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ABSTRACT

**OUR STORIES, HIS STORY:
UNVEILING THE SOCIOCULTURAL BARRIERS OF SINGAPORE CHINESE
ELDERLY WHEN THEY FOLLOW JESUS**

Nam Seng Koh

The elderly are becoming the fastest growing population segment in the world. In 2000, their number was about 605 million; it is projected to grow to two billion by 2050, when, for the first time in history, older persons will outnumber children. According to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, by the end of the century, 27 percent of the world's population will consist of older persons.

In Singapore, the context for this dissertation, life expectancy grew from 66 in 1960 to 80.9 in 2008. To address such population shifts and the needs they engender, government authorities have periodically revised public policies to address emerging needs. The church, however, has seemed largely oblivious, and studies of the elderly and their needs are scarce---this, in spite of the fact that, in Singapore, for example, the Chinese elderly Christian population has also been increasing. What accounts for this? Are they enjoying the abundance of life in Christ? What unique barriers do Chinese elderly persons face when they become followers of Jesus? How might they be addressed?

This dissertation aimed to look into those questions. It used a qualitative approach based on the life stories of 24 Chinese persons who were baptized at age 60 or older. The stories, the result of extensive interviews, revealed several socio-cultural barriers of significance. Behind the barriers lay two fundamental factors: (1) not hearing any serious witness to the gospel in their younger years; and (2) the dominance of their traditional Chinese and religious milieu. But, as the interviews showed, that was not all, for life was

harsh and family needs were immediate and pressing. The consistent testimony of the interviewees was that they unconditionally committed themselves to work and family as their ultimate priorities. Therefore, those, too, would become stumbling blocks to finding and following Jesus daily in life.

Many Chinese who decided to follow the religion of their Christian loved ones did so because of crises after retirement and the insecurity of aging. Almost inevitably, though, their initial intention to follow Jesus was superficial, not transformative. After baptism, many older Chinese persons took their new faith seriously only in terms of worship and tithing. Impediments from their past lives kept them from enjoying the abundance of life in Christ.

The findings of this study point to the importance for elderly Chinese Christians of being guided into a process of transforming identity as the children of God, if they are to enjoy the joyful abundance of the Christian life. For this to happen, and for their new identity to deepen, the church must become a new family. By taking this responsibility seriously, the church can also help the elderly embrace a transformed worldview of work, family, and their past and tradition. As the church better understands God's intention of blessing and transforming the elderly for his glory, it, too, will see change and grasp its responsibility to unleash them from the negative stereotypes in an ageist culture. Hence, positive changes are possible in the aging process for Chinese Christian older persons, helping them to enjoy the abundance of life in Christ with hope.

**OUR STORIES, HIS STORY:
UNVEILING THE SOCIOCULTURAL BARRIERS OF SINGAPORE CHINESE
ELDERLY WHEN THEY FOLLOW JESUS**

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Dissertation Committee:
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Acknowledgements: A Family Story of Thanksgiving

Mrs. Wang was sitting on the sofa outside the kitchen, knitting a new sleeve for an old sweater. Brothers and sisters were preparing the weekly love feast. The rhythmic sound of vegetables being chopped and aroma of the soup on the stove filled the air. She saw me and stretched out her hands, an invitation for me to sit beside her. After a short conversation, she said that she remembered who I was, and described the details when my mother and I came to the church to seek for her son-in-law to be my “match-maker.” Though she is 91 years old, I admire her memory and also the work of her hands, weaving old and new together so that nothing is wasted, and so that she can keep herself warm in the approaching winter.

She asked about my family, and I told her that my son is in Singapore serving national service, my wife and my daughter are in United States, and I am in Taiwan for a recording project as well as visiting the seminary that I will be serving after my graduation. She was pleased and wanted to bless my family. After the church service, she found me and she gave me a box filled with her beautiful knitting works: two pairs of one-and-a-half-inch socks, two scarves, and a little vest. She said the green socks are for my son, the scarves for my daughter, and little vest for my future grandchild. She pointed to the bright red socks and spoke a blessing over me, “For you and your wife, shines like the flaming red fire, be filled with peace and eternal love.” (火火红红, 平平安安, 恩爱一生)

I am so thankful for her blessings, with symbols of goodwill that I could receive so tangibly. As I was eating the “love feast,” the taste of home lingered in each and every dish. The image of 91-year-old Mrs. Wang sitting on the sofa beside the bustling kitchen

reflected the beauty of home in the church, and I think this should be the essence of the church - where touch, smell, taste, share, embrace and love are like those of a family. It is the Word of God lived out in this nitty-gritty of life.

I feel so blessed and so loved by my heavenly Father, for He has gathered people around me and brought “home” to me in this journey of faith. My heart is filled with gratitude, and I wanted to take this opportunity to say “thank you.”

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I want to thank many loving couples, brothers and sisters and organizations that supported me and my family in the past seven years. We experienced the tangible love of God through you:

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翔芳长老/ 萍萍, 宇光/ 惠玲, 超哥/ 宝金, 铭枢长老/ 永丽姐, 镇丰长老
/Aunt Lay, 志光牧师/ 楚雄师母, 孙长老/ Aunt Susan, 南生兄/ 赛凤姐,
天禄兄/ 娇姐, 光荣/ 慧芬, 镪辉/ 景芸, 陈世协牧师, 王卿云长老, 雪萍长
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The love of God binds us together as one big family, beyond time and space.

Also, to my blood-related family: My mother in Singapore and my mother-in-law in Taiwan, thank you for praying for us ceaselessly; I want to share the fruit of your prayers with you. Thanks to my late father-in-law, you are always a great exemplar of faith to me. Thanks to my eldest sister for embracing me into your home during my six-month field research, Ah Nng, you fed me with your specialties that always kept me wanting more. Also, my eldest brother, thank you for driving me to many lunches during my field research. We have missed a lot of bonding time when we were young; thanks for making up. Last

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May the blessing of Mrs. Wang remind us to shine for our Lord as we continue to listen to their stories; writing our stories, knitting the new and the older generations together, into His story. Through these stories, may the name of our heavenly Father be glorified!

1 Our Stories, His Story -- Introduction

1.1 Autobiographical Background

This research started from a personal journey of self-discovery. I was born into a Daoist family, and with the best efforts to trace my lineage, for the past three generations, I am the first Christian in my household. Later, my mother became a Christian and I became a pastor. As I pondered my past, I was surprised by the sociocultural and theological implications my lineage and journey of faith held.

Andrew Walls states,

Our past is the clue to our identity. It has made us what we are, and without it we would not know ourselves. To lose one's memory is to lose one's past, to lose one's past means to be rootless, insecure, unable to form assured relationships.¹

While agreeing with Walls that it is essential to remember the past, what if the past is filled with sorrow, bitterness and unresolved relationships? What if the past is rooted in insecurity and unassured relationship? To a Chinese elderly, what is the purpose of remembering and knowing their identity when they see no hope of reconciliation when one's roots are unveiled?

More importantly, Walls links the past with Christian conversion; as such, it is with the hope that when one is in Christ, everything will be made new (2 Cor. 5:17). Only then can remembering the past become meaningful and essential. In fact, Walls suggests that no conversion is complete without the conversion of the past.² Hence, when one

¹ Andrew F Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.; Edinburgh: Orbis Books ; T&T Clark, 1996), 45.

² Ibid., 53

follows Jesus, one will see their past with new meanings. Thus, I begin this dissertation with my grandmother's story.

1.1.1 Life story of my grandmother

My grandmother passed away at the age of eighty-six. For most of her life she lived with her employer's family. She had been their maid since she came to Singapore in the early forties from the southern part of China. She was only thirty at that time. After spending fifty years with the same family, although she was long accepted as one of their family members, she resigned. She said she was dying soon, and she should not die in an outsider's house.

My grandmother had two children. In the Chinese tradition, parents stay with their eldest son, but she lost touch with my uncle after his failure in marriage and career. My grandmother did not request to stay with my mother, who is her biological daughter, as both of them were never on good terms. My mother lamented that my grandmother forced her to marry my father although she knew he was a womanizer. My grandmother ended up staying with my second sister after her resignation. My sister and her husband earn their living as Daoist handcrafters; they build paper houses and other items for Daoist burials. And although I was very close to my grandmother, the reasons for her choice to live with my sister were complicated.

After I was married, I tried very hard to share the gospel with my grandmother. At that time, she was still staying with her employer. During the weekends, I would bring her back to stay with us, and she would attend church with us during her stays. For my grandmother's sake, I changed my membership to a Teochew-speaking church as she was conversant in the Teochew dialect but did not understand Mandarin Chinese. After

attending the Teochew church for two years, I was called to further equip myself theologically in Taiwan, and almost simultaneously she decided to resign from her work. I think even if I was in Singapore at that time, she would probably have chosen not to stay with me. She told me she would not become a Christian as she had already prepared her altar to be with her husband who died when she was only twenty-nine.

Three years after my theological training, I came back to Singapore and became a pastor of the Teochew church and served as a minister to the Teochew congregation. I continued the practice of bringing my grandmother home during the weekends. She attended church with us and she even participated in the elderly retreat in which I was one of the organizers and speakers. The Teochew church brought her near to elderly people who devoted themselves to the Christian faith. These living witnesses helped her understand Christianity in her Chinese context and she became more open to the gospel.

In 2005, my grandmother was diagnosed with pneumonia, and that was the first time in her life that she was admitted to a hospital. When she was hospitalized, my co-worker visited her and asked if she would like to be baptized. My grandmother agreed and hastily my co-worker contacted me and also my senior pastor to conduct the baptism at the hospital. (According to the Presbyterian bylaws, only an ordained minister can conduct baptism; I was not ordained at that time.)

I was trembling with joy as I called my mother and the rest of our family members to go to the hospital immediately. As we gathered around her sickbed, my senior pastor, with a crystal baptismal bowl of water in his hand, asked my grandmother for confirmation. My grandmother was too frail to speak but she shook her head. My senior pastor asked again, in the presence of the whole family, my sister and brother-in-

law included, and she shook her head again. Two days after this episode, my grandmother passed away.

I was disappointed and started to ponder -- What were the factors that impeded my grandmother from baptism at that moment of decision? How can I help other elderly who have similar experiences to remove their barriers? Did I consider her sociocultural context when I shared the gospel with her? These are not merely my personal questions. As a pastor, I came across many young adults who were equally burdened with the desire to bring their elderly parents to Christ. They roughly know their sociocultural roots but often have no time to understand deeper. They know little of their heart language, usually dialects, for many communicate with their parents only in Singapore's official Chinese dialect, Mandarin. There are indeed many obstacles to overcome, and the best these young adults can do is to bring their elderly parents to church. Yet for these busy adults in Singapore, even this in itself is not an easy task. Further, when these elderly come to the church, discipling the elderly to enjoy the abundance in Christ is another challenge. This is obvious in my mother's faith journey.

1.1.2 Life story of my mother

My mother was baptized at the age of 65. She had been a devout Daoist since she migrated from China to Singapore in 1949. She performed her religious duties faithfully. For more than forty years of her life, on every first and fifteenth day of the month in the lunar calendar, she diligently prepared offerings for the gods and goddesses. In bad times, it was simply fresh fruits and some *Char-Siew Pao* (pork buns); when times are good, in terms of wealth, there would be chicken, duck, fish, and many other

delicacies. In return, she believed that these gods would bless her and the entire family with peace, health and wealth.

My mother came to Christ after a long series of misfortunes, not in monetary terms but in many failures in relationships. First of all, her father passed away when she was a little child; life was tough at that time. She had no chance to go to school but had to work for a living as an “*attap-maker*” (binding coconut leaves for the roof). She was betrothed by my grandmother without her consent. Although arranged marriages are very common in Chinese tradition, my mother held grudges against her mother. My mother told us that while my grandmother knew my father was not a trustworthy person, she still agreed to the proposal. Soon after her marriage, my father kept two mistresses even before his business began to bloom. Nevertheless, even in the midst of such a horrifying relationship, my mother gave birth to five children. Probably that is the power of Chinese tradition: women are always at the disposal of men.

These misfortunes happened during drastic social changes in Singapore: the Second World War, the modernization of Singapore developing from a fishing village into a highly efficient, first-world city, and Chinese tradition being impacted by globalization. My mother had to adapt to all these changes.

When she was sixty, my father passed away due to a sudden heart attack. Although she had to “share” her husband with another two women, my mother suddenly realized she had no one to rely on. With much evaluative reflection, she decided to become a Christian, mainly because I was the only son living with her at her point of decision, and she wanted to follow what I believed so that someone would take care of her when she is old and the matters after her death.

My mother is eighty years old now. Over the past ten years since her baptism, there have been distinct changes in her lifestyle after her conversion to Christianity. She now occupies her new life with activities. She is involved in the church choir, sisters' fellowship, and also in a para-church organization that helps the elderly to learn how to serve one another. On the one hand, these programs keep her busy. On the other hand, there are a lot of issues, mainly dealing with relationships, that she is escaping from or does not know how to handle. As a result, she has become very uptight when she is all alone by herself at home. She often worries that she will become ill; the fears of cancer and dementia haunt her. Sometimes she feels guilty for not serving as she is afraid that she will lose the blessings from God. In terms of spiritual maturity, to build relationships with people and with God, there is still much room for growth.

How can one help the elderly like my mother to continue growing in Christ? These elderly are embedded in their sociocultural myths that obstruct them from living out the fullness of life in Christ. My mother is not alone in this respect; many elderly share the same struggles.

However, this is often neglected by the church after their baptism. Many elderly misunderstand baptism as a passport to heaven; and Chinese churches focus more on pre-evangelism ministry rather than continued discipleship. Hence, so long as the elderly are baptized, they are left to struggle by themselves. In this sense, baptism only prepares them to die rather than to live abundantly in Christ.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Purpose

My problem statement is, therefore, that *the identities of Singapore Chinese elderly are shaped by sociocultural tradition that become formidable barriers when they follow Jesus – barriers often overlooked or neglected by the church.*

The purpose of this research is *to discover, through studying of the life story of Singapore's Chinese elderly life stories, the nature of the barriers they face when they follow Jesus.*

1.3 Research Question

Some scholars suggest that research on religion, spirituality, and aging ought to aim at understanding, rather than explanation, given the multidimensionality of religion and religious experience, and the complexity of human lives with diverse and dynamic bio-psycho and social-cultural interactions across time.³ This is explicitly demonstrated in the above life stories. Informed by these scholars, my research question is-- *what is the nature of the sociocultural barriers that Singaporean Chinese elderly encounter when they follow Jesus?* This research seeks to understand the nature through life story queries (See appendix 1 and 2) and thus unveils the reasons why the Chinese elderly change their religion in their old age.

1.4 Definition of Key Terms

Chinese elderly: Chinese elderly in this dissertation refer to the Chinese-speaking elderly. It should be noted that there is a vast difference between in the social

³ Xu Jianbin and Kalyani K Mehta, "The Effects of Religion on Subjective Aging in Singapore: An Interreligious Comparison," *Journal of Aging Studies* 17, no. 4 (2003), 487.

status of English-speaking and Chinese-speaking Chinese in Singapore.⁴ Amongst the Chinese-speaking group, the dialect-speaking elderly were more marginalized, especially, when the government launched the “Speak Mandarin Campaign” in 1978.⁵ Thereafter, Chinese dialects almost disappeared from the mass media, except the newscasts. Up until 2010, Chinese dialects were still the most frequently spoken language for the majority of the Chinese elderly (64 percent) at home.⁶ Chinese aged 55 and above who speak *only* the Chinese language (that is, no English) constituted 42 percent of this Chinese age group.⁷ In pure statistic, they amounted to 277,479 that translates to 7.4 percent of the total population. There is no statistic on elderly who speak *only* Chinese dialects.

Use of “Elderly” as a Noun: In regards to the usage of the term “elderly” as a noun, two of the major gerontology journals, *Journals of Gerontology* and *Gerontologist*, have adopted an editorial policy that it should only be used as an adjective, such as “elderly people” or “the elderly population” but not as “the elderly.”⁸ The Gerontological

⁴ Kuan Yew Lee, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*. (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings : Times Editions, 1998), 167. Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of Singapore noted that in the 1950s, the Chinese-educated was marginalized by the British government. However, this situation continued when English was used as the working language among the different ethnic groups in Singapore; Eugene K B Tan, “Re-Engaging Chineseness: Political, Economic and Cultural Imperatives of Nation-Building in Singapore,” *China Quarterly VO - 2003*, 758-759.

⁵ Kuan Yew Lee, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*. (Singapore: Times Editions, 2000), 179.

⁶ Singapore Department of Statistics Yuet, Mei Wong and Teo, Zhiwei(Income, Expenditure and Population Statistics Division, “Statistics Singapore Newsletter: The Elderly in Singapore,” last modified 2011, accessed April 28, 2015, https://www.singstat.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/publications/publications_and_papers/population_and_population_structure/ssnsep11-pg1-9.pdf..

⁷ “Statistics Singapore - Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 1 - Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion,” Table 39, accessed April 12, 2014, http://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/publications-and-papers/cop2010/census10_stat_release1.

⁸ Todd D Nelson, *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice Against Older Persons* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), 341.

Society of America (GSA) recommends to use older people, older adults, older persons, or elders. This is to emphasize the humanity of the individuals.⁹

However, in the East, “elderly” is used interchangeably as a noun or adjective. “Elderly” is a respectful term; it has no pejorative connotation in Chinese society. Whilst acknowledging the position of the West, this dissertation will continue to use “elderly” as in the Chinese sociocultural context.

Life story: According to Robert Atkinson, a life story “can cover the time from birth to present or before and beyond. It includes the important events, experiences and feelings of a lifetime.”¹⁰ It can take different forms: factual, metaphorical, poetic or any other creatively expressive form. Whatever form it takes, a life story always brings order and meaning to the life being narrated, for both the teller and the listener.¹¹ Atkinson defines a life story as the story a person chooses to share about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another.¹²

Follow Jesus: This dissertation does not adopt the term conversion in order to avoid the different definitions of conversion arise from different theological standpoints.¹³ Charles Arn notes that the issue of identifying and measuring religious conversion is complex as it is difficult to define exactly what religious conversion is and the issue of

⁹ Ibid., 342

¹⁰ Robert Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1998), 8.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Richard V Peace, “Conflicting Understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 2004); Charles. Arn, *White unto Harvest . Evangelizing Today's Senior Adults* (Monrovia, CA: Institute for American Church Growth, 2003), 30-31.

determining when it occurs.¹⁴ Richard Peace articulates the meaning of conversion in five major Christian traditions: evangelicals, Pentecostal, mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox. He concludes that no one tradition has a complete understanding of conversion, each having to learn from the others. Hence, approaching conversion from any of these traditions limits the understanding of the faith journey of the Chinese elderly in different theological framework. The focus of this dissertation is to understand the faith journey of elderly from their perspective. “Following Jesus” brings the focus back to Jesus as we understand the elderly. It also enables the elderly to see their new lives through the life of Jesus.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

For life story interview, Atkinson proposes the suspension of theoretical assumptions until after the interview and then determine if and what theories emerge from the story. His argument is that it takes a perspective broader than the researcher to fully understand a life story. No one theory will fit all people, although an outside theoretical frame may help to gain a greater appreciation of the story.¹⁵ However, as this research is looking particularly for the barriers elderly encounter when they follow Jesus, one broad framework will be employed.

From the perspective of religious conversion, Lewis Rambo also agrees that no framework can encompass the whole of reality in conversion. However, based on his extensive survey of the literature, numerous interviews with converts and participant-observation research, at the very least, he suggests, four components that must be

¹⁴ Ibid., 34

¹⁵ Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 66

included in understanding religious change: cultural, social, personal and religious systems.¹⁶ The four categories are briefly delineated as follows:

Cultural: Culture constructs the intellectual, moral and spiritual atmosphere of life. The myths, rituals, and symbols of a culture provide guidelines for living which are often unconsciously adopted and taken for granted.¹⁷ However, culture is not always a barrier; it also facilitates religious change. Hence, obstacles and pathways in the Chinese culture will be observed in this research.

Social: This category includes the social condition, important relationships and institutions in which the elderly are connected. Also, the interaction between the elderly and the society, and the expectations of the group in which they are involved has to be taken into account.

Personality: Different personalities respond differently in the same cultural and social setting. There are different psychological theories to observe a person, such as psychoanalytic, behaviorist, humanistic, transpersonal, social and cognitive psychology and so forth.¹⁸ While acknowledging that different theoretical perspectives have different emphases on personalities, this research focus more on the sociocultural aspects that impact the elderly.

Religion: Rambo states that interpretation of religious conversion that denies the religious dimensions fail to appreciate the convert's experience. It would be inappropriate to put religious experience into a mere interpretative, and may even be

¹⁶ Lewis R Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1993), 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

understood as hostile to the phenomenon.¹⁹ He points out that some psychological and sociological explanations of conversion are reductionist with religious experiences being discounted or rejected by the researcher.²⁰ Hence, this dissertation takes religious or transcendence experience into account seriously and respectfully.

1.6 Significance of Research

Although this research was initiated for personal reasons, it is significant in the following six reasons discussed below.

1.6.1 Elderly people is the fastest growing population

Elderly people, aged 60-plus, are becoming the fastest growing population in the world.²¹ In 2000, the number was estimated at 605 million. That number is projected to grow to almost 2 billion by 2050 when the population of older persons will be larger than the population of children (0-14 years) for the first time in human history.²² 54 percent, the largest share of the world's older persons, live in Asia. Significantly, the most rapid increases in the sixty and older population are occurring in industrialized countries.²³ By 2050, China elderly population alone will equal the total population of United States.

¹⁹ Ibid., 10

²⁰ Ibid., 11

²¹ "Global AgeWatch Index 2014: Insight Report, Summary and Methodology | Reports | Global AgeWatch Index 2015," accessed April 27, 2015, <http://www.helppage.org/global-agewatch/reports/global-agewatch-index-2014-insight-report-summary-and-methodology/>.

²² Ibid.

²³ "Why Population Aging Matters: A Global Perspective | National Institute on Aging," accessed October 2, 2015, <https://www.nia.nih.gov/research/publication/why-population-aging-matters-global-perspective>.

In the case of Singapore, with the continued decline in fertility and the improvements in healthcare, elderly citizens, aged 65 years and above, who comprised 8.4 percent in 2005, are projected to increase to 28.9 percent by the year 2050.²⁴

1.6.2 Longer Life Expectancy

According to the US National Institute on Aging, 85 percent of all children born in postindustrial nations can now expect to reach age sixty-five and many will experience two more decades of relatively healthy life.²⁵ This is due to advances in science, technology, and medicine that have resulted in reductions in infant and maternal mortality, infectious and parasitic diseases, occupational safety measures, and improvements in nutrition and education.²⁶

In the case of Singapore, average life expectancy has increased from 66 in 1970 to 80.9 years in 2008. Females have a longer life expectancy of 83.2 years, males, 78.4.²⁷ Hence, there is still ample time and space for the elderly to encounter the gospel, grow spiritually, and live abundantly in Christ.

1.6.3 High percentage of unreached elderly in Singapore

The 2010 Singapore Census reported that within the Chinese subpopulation in Singapore, Buddhists accounted for 43 percent, Daoists 11 percent, Christians 20 percent,

²⁴ “Report of the Committee on Ageing Issues, 2006 - Ministry of Social and Family Development,” accessed October 2, 2015, <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Publications/Report-of-the-Committee-on-Ageing-Issues-P2006>.

²⁵ Sokolovsky, *The Cultural Context of Aging: Worldwide Perspective*; Robert N Butler, *The Longevity Revolution . The Benefits and Challenges of Living a Long Life* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008).

²⁶ “Challenges of Global Aging,” last modified 2014, accessed October 2, 2014, http://www.acl.gov/NewsRoom/Publications/docs/Challenges_of_Global_Aging_1.pdf.

²⁷ “Report on the State of the Elderly - Ministry of Social and Family Development,” Release 1, 10, accessed October 2, 2015, <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Research-Room/Research-Statistics/Report-on-the-State-of-the-Elderly>.

and 22 percent stated that they had “no religion.” (Table 1-1) But for those aged 55 years and above, the oldest age range offered in the statistical table, 53.9 percent identified themselves as Buddhist or Daoist and 13.3 percent as having no religion. With the inclusion of Islam, Hinduism, other religions and no religion, the non-Christian population total up to 82.7 percent. (Table 1-2) Hence, while the total Christian population in Singapore grew from 14.6 percent (2000) to 18.3 percent (2010), there is still a large unreached elderly population.

Religion/Year	2000	2010	Percentage Change
Buddhism	53.6	43.0	-10.6
Daoism	10.8	14.4	3.6
Christianity	16.5	20.1	3.6
Other Religions	0.5	0.7	0.2
No Religion	18.6	21.8	3.2

Table 1-1 Percentage change in religion among Chinese ethnic group of aged 15 years and over (Source: Singapore Census of Population 2010)

Religion/Year	2000	2010	Percentage Change
Buddhism	42.5	33.3	-10.8
Daoism	8.5	10.9	2.4
Christianity	14.6	18.3	3.7
Islam	14.9	14.7	-0.2
Hinduism	4.0	5.1	1.1
Other Religions	0.6	0.7	0.1
No Religion	14.8	17.0	2.2

Table 1-2 Percentage change in religion among aged 15 years and over (Source: Singapore Census of Population 2010)

Percentage of religious change is high among Buddhist, Daoist and Christian elderly (Table 1-3). This suggests that religious change is mostly among these three religious groups. In Table 1-4, “Percentage Change in Christianity by Age Group,” shows that religious change happened in all age groups. Although percentage change is highest within the 15 – 24 years range (4.9 percent), for the range of 55 years and over,

there is still a 3.6 percent change. Hence, this data speaks against theories which state that religion change only occurs during adolescence. This will be further discussed in chapter two.

Religion/Year	2000	2010	Percentage Change
Buddhism	47.4	36.9	-9.5
Daoism	12.7	17.0	4.3
Christianity	13.7	17.3	4.6
Islam	12.3	11.5	-1.2
Hinduism	3.5	3.2	-0.3
Other Religions	0.7	0.7	0
No Religion	9.8	13.4	3.6

Table 1-3 Percentage change in religion among age cohort 55 and above (Source: Singapore Census of Population 2010)

Age Group /Year	2000	2010	Percentage Change
15 - 24 years	12.8	17.7	4.9
25 - 34 years	15.8	18.4	2.6
35 – 44 years	15.7	20.3	4.6
45 – 54 years	14.4	18.2	3.8
55 years and over	13.7	17.3	3.6

Table 1-4 Percentage change in Christianity by age group (Source: Singapore Census of Population 2010)

Singapore has a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-religious population, and one of the leading developed nations in Asia,²⁸ unveiling the thick web of sociocultural myth enveloping the Chinese elderly in Singapore would provide significant insights for many churches in the developing nations of Asia, especially to the millions of lost and abandoned elderly in China.

²⁸ C J Wan-ling. Wee, "The Asian Modern Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore" (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 3.

1.6.4 Scarce research about religion in the field of gerontology

Dissertations on both aging and Christianity are few, even from theological institutions and seminaries. The *Global Agewatch Index 2013*, states that “data on the situation of people in later life is still scarce even in sectors such as public health, employment and the economy, which directly affects the lives of millions.”²⁹ As well, although there is an increasing interest in studying aging within religious traditions in the recent years, most of the studies conducted in Singapore are not from the Judeo-Christian tradition.³⁰ In terms of religious change among the elderly, studies are even more limited.³¹

A recap of the study of gerontology and religion in the United States: It should be noted that the study of aging was first initiated by predominantly Christian sources between the early 1950s to the 1970s. However, in 1971, the White House Conference on Aging replaced the term “religiosity” with “spiritual well-being.” Thereafter, the study of religion was absorbed into the field of gerontology. Spiritual well-being was often shortened to just “spirituality,” with no connotation to any specific religion.³² Therefore, even when there are research and studies on aging and elderly people, the subject of religion is often only presented in demographic data. It was not until the 1980s that the role of religion began to regain attention in in the field of gerontology.³³

²⁹ “Global AgeWatch Index 2013: Insight Report, Summary and Methodology | Reports | Global AgeWatch Index 2015,” 5, accessed October 2, 2015, <http://www.helpage.org/global-agewatch/reports/global-agewatch-index-2013-insight-report-summary-and-methodology/>.

³⁰ Jianbin and Mehta, “The Effects of Religion on Subjective Aging in Singapore: An Interreligious Comparison,” 485.

³¹ R.Krause Hayward Neal, “Changes in Religious Group Affiliation During Older Adulthood: Evidence from an 11-Year Longitudinal Study.,” *Review of Religious Research* 56, no. 4 (December 2014). 541.

³² James W Ellor, *Methods in Religion, Spirituality & Aging* (London: Routledge, 2009), viii.

³³ Susan H McFadden, “Introduction: Beginning the Conversation,” in Melvin. Kimble McFadden, Susan H., *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion. a Handbook Volume 2* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2003), 1.

Such scholarship is even more lacking in Asia, with Chinese Christian scholars focusing more on biblical studies than in the field of practical theology. Further, in the field of practical theology, aging has never been a popular subject. And for the churches, more emphasis is put on children, youth, and adult ministries. Subsequently, elderly or senior adult ministry is often marginalized. With the purpose of understanding the sociocultural barriers encountered by the Chinese elderly in following Jesus, this research will help to develop an appropriate approach for the evangelization and discipleship of the elderly.

1.6.5 Aging and Ageism

In my six years of pastoral experience, I have observed that visiting the elderly or elderly ministry has never been a top priority of our church ministries. Often, priorities are placed on the children, youth or adults ministry. This neglect or discrimination is also widespread in the churches of Unites States. A recent research study, according to Michael Parker, finds that pastors stop visiting elderly members who reside in long term care facilities once they detect or have confirmed that a resident is suffering from dementia.³⁴ Statistics also reveal that half of those who reach eighty-five or older will suffer from some form of dementia.³⁵ This implies that many demented elderly will be abandoned in these facilities for the remainder of their lives without pastoral care.

Singapore, as an economy-dependent nation, overly stresses that the survival of the nation depends on high productivity and efficiency. Implicitly, it projects a negative image of the elderly who are no longer productive and efficient. Elderly have become a

³⁴ J M Houston and Michael W Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 31.

³⁵ Ibid.

problem and thus a burden to the nation. Consequently, aging has become an ugly word in Singapore culture.

Unfortunately, without discernment, many churches in Singapore have also adopted the ageist attitude of the secular world. Most Chinese churches address the topics of aging and death only when it happens. In the Chinese tradition, aging and death are taboos; even the thought of the word "death" can bring bad luck. "As people do not talk about death, they do not prepare for it."³⁶ Consequently, elderly people are embedded in such sociocultural myths that many life threatening issues are swept under the carpet. This research aims to understand the elderly in their own voices so that the damage of ageism is reduced.

1.6.6 Multi-significance of life story

Stories by themselves are powerful tool of evangelism. N.T. Wright states that stories constitute the core of every culture's worldview. Stories are peculiarly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews.³⁷ As the life stories of these elderly are told, it encourages others to see their past in new perspective. Robert Atkinson resonates this, suggesting that by studying life stories one "can gain fresh insights into human dilemmas, human struggles, and human triumph."³⁸ As for the life story teller her/himself, William Randall and Elizabeth McKim states,

Tasting some of the presentness of the past, we can entertain alternative interpretations of it, which in turn empowers us to deal with its *unresolved issues* and, eventually, let it go. In expanding, examining, and

³⁶ Amy Yin Man Chow and Cecilia L W Chan, *Death, Dying and Bereavement : A Hong Kong Chinese Experience* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 2.

³⁷ N T Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 40.

³⁸ Atkinson , *The Life Story Interview*, 14.

transforming our stories, we release ourselves, little by little, from their spell.³⁹ (*Italics mine*)

Telling the story enables the teller to see their past with new meanings. It provides opportunities for reconciliation to “unresolved issues.” Dan McAdams asserts that stories have the function of integration, bringing together disparate ideas, characters, happenings, and other elements of life that were previously set apart into an understandable frame.⁴⁰ This could be a complex and painful process, but putting things together into a narrative pattern helps to affirm life meaning and purpose. Moreover, McAdams points out that life stories mirror the culture wherein the story is told.⁴¹ Thus life stories can unveil the sociocultural barriers of the elderly as they follow Jesus.

Life stories are also a form of creating and preserving legacies. As “old age is increasingly being defined in terms of the dangers of being unknown,”⁴² William Thomas warns, “every human life has or should have a legacy.” Thomas states that legacy is important for the following reasons:

- Foster gerotranscendence⁴³ by encouraging the rethinking of an elder’s life.
- Fulfill our duty to honor elders.
- Create and strengthen the intergenerational bonds of affection.

³⁹ William Lowell Randall and A Elizabeth. McKim, “Reading Our Lives the Poetics of Growing Old” (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 275.

⁴⁰ Dan P McAdams, “Personal Narratives and the Life Story,,” in *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research (3rd Ed.)*, ed. Oliver P John, Richard W Robins, and Lawrence A Pervin (New York, NY, US: Guilford Press, 2008), 242–262.

⁴¹ Ibid., 246.

⁴² William H Thomas, *What Are Old People for? : How Elders Will Save the World* (Acton, Mass.: VanderWyk & Burnham, 2004), 295.

⁴³ Lars Tornstam is the creator of the theory of “gerotranscendence.” This model suggests that human longevity includes the potential for a transcendent movement away from the materialistic and rational point of view common in the first half of life. Successful completion of such a shift is accompanied by an increase in life satisfaction.

- Answer important questions about our own lives and locate our own experiences within the vast terrain of human experience.
- Serve as an ongoing reminder of the value and importance of elderhood.⁴⁴

Hence, as the life stories are collected, this research contributes to preserving the legacies of the Chinese elderly in Singapore, especially the diminishing Chinese-dialect-speaking community.

1.7 Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. The following chapter, Chapter 2, discusses the sociocultural context of the Singapore Chinese-speaking elderly. It also serves as the Literature Review that explores on the barriers encountered by the Chinese elderly when they follow Jesus.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology employed in this research. It outlines the criteria of the research population, sampling procedure, instruments, data gathering procedure, and data analysis procedures.

Chapter 4 provides the analysis of the life stories. This chapter reveals the barriers that obstruct the elderly from following Jesus. The barriers are the Daoist/Buddhist tradition, lack of Christian witness, family background and busyness with work. Pathways to Jesus are also included.

Chapter 5 presents the life stories in four themes: (1) Work is King, (2) Busyness and Bitterness, (3) The Filial Daughter-in-law and (4) Life is Good. These themes enable the barriers to be understood in the particular background and social status of the elderly.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 297-8

Chapter 6 proposes three missiological implications. These implications are derived from three perspectives. From the view of soteriology, this study argues that following Jesus is a process of forming identity as children of God. Ecclesiologically, the church serves as an extended family to the elderly in order to deepen this identity. From the perspective of gerontology, the identity as children of God redefines the elderly in the glory of God and thus liberates them from the ageist culture. Hence, positive change is possible in old age.

The final chapter, chapter 7, concludes with strengths and limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

1.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the life stories of my grandmother and my mother were summarized to introduce the background of this research. Birthed from these stories, the research question was “*What is the nature of the sociocultural barriers Chinese elderly encounter when they follow Jesus?*”

Although this research was initiated from a journey of personal reflection, it has significance, especially, with the growing elderly population across the globe. Also, elderly in postmodern nations are often neglected and marginalized. They are unable to contribute economically and are considered an “issue” instead. As well, unconsciously, the church also adopts the same stance in dealing with the elderly.

Finally, through life stories interviews, Chinese elderly can be known in their own voices and the ageist attitude will be altered. As the Chinese elderly follow Jesus, they can enjoy the abundance in Christ.

Hence, the purpose of this dissertation is *to discover, through studying the life stories of Singapore's Chinese elderly, the nature of the barriers they face when they follow Jesus.*

2 What have we known about the Chinese elderly? --Literature Review

2.1 Overview

The purpose of this research is to understand the sociocultural barriers faced by Chinese elderly in Singapore when they follow Jesus. As mentioned in the previous chapter, literature that focuses on the relationship between elderly and religion is still scarce. Most gerontology literature is more concerned with physical and mental health or psychological and social well-being.

In religious journals and publications, themes on personal spirituality and pastoral care of older person are gaining more attention.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, these works are essential to understanding aging and elderly.

In the case of Singapore, research that focuses on religious conversion among the elderly is also limited. However, since the 1980s, the government has looked to address issues facing the aging population.⁴⁶ Proposals and policies are actively revised to fit the changing context of aging in Singapore. Helping the elderly to age successfully has been the overarching theme of recent research.

In relation to this research, this literature review includes the following sections:

- 1) The biblical perspectives on aging and major aging theories: This dissertation adopts the stance that human beings are each uniquely created by God in His image, and that growing old is as important as other stages of life. Since each elderly person is

⁴⁵ I conducted a search on the *Journal of Religion, Spirituality, and Aging* from 1984 to 2015. This journal was named as *Journal of Religion and Aging* in 1984; and then *Journal of Religious Gerontology* from 1991 to 2005. No article on the theme of “religious conversion” was found.

⁴⁶ Angelique Chan, “Social Policies for the Aged in Singapore,” in Chee Kiong Tong and Kwen Fee Lian, *Social Policy in Post-Industrial Singapore* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 76.

uniquely created, there can be no overarching theory. Therefore understanding different theories will enhance our view of aging and how the elderly change.

- 2) Singapore aging policies: Singapore sociologist, Chee Kong Tong, states that in order to understand religion in Singapore, it is essential to know the role of the government in Singapore society. By and large, the government attempts to manage every aspect of life through social policies.⁴⁷ These social policies, along with the national surveys on the state of the elderly, delineate the social context of the Chinese elderly in Singapore.
- 3) Religious conversion among the elderly: At this point in writing, research on the religious conversion of the Chinese elderly is nonexistent, save for some statistics; any studies on conversion are mostly drawn from the English-speaking community.⁴⁸ For literature on the conversion experience of the elderly, this section leans more on the limited research in the United States.

2.2 Biblical Perspectives and Aging Theories

This section begins with the biblical perspectives on aging to analyze how views of aging among the Chinese elderly change as they follow Jesus. In addition, social and psychological theories on aging are surveyed to understand aging from different perspectives.

⁴⁷ Chee Kiong Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore Society*, (Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2007., 2007), 2.

⁴⁸ Joseph B Tamney and Riaz Hassan, *Religious Switching in Singapore: A Study of Religious Mobility*, (Singapore : Select Books, 1987); Clive Shuck-Lung Chin, "The Perception of Christianity as a Rational Religion in Singapore: A Missiological Analysis of Christian Conversion," (PhD. diss., Trinity International University, 2014).

2.2.1 Biblical Perspectives

The Bible does not offer a clear-cut theory of aging. Rather, James Houston and Michael Parker highlight how the Bible's emphasis on aging is "upon the moral and spiritual growth of those seeking to become mature in wisdom."⁴⁹ Nevertheless, elderly in the Bible play an important role in blessing and exhorting the younger generation. They are much respected and well taken care by the community.

Old Testament

In the Old Testament, old age is often connected with wisdom. Joel Ajayi in *A Biblical Theology of Gerassapience*, expounds this connection.⁵⁰ He states that wisdom has its roots in the nature of Yahweh; *gerassapience* must be aligned with or subjected to *theosapience*. Otherwise, Yahweh often overrules *gerassapient* activities.⁵¹ As the wisdom literature repeatedly reiterates, the fear of Yahweh is the genesis of wisdom (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Ajayi asserts textually that the Old Testament describes old age and its accompanying wisdom as a reward from Yahweh both directly (Gen. 17: 15-17, 24:1; Isa. 65:20; Zech. 8:4.) and indirectly (Gen. 15:15; 18:9-15; Deut. 34:7; Ps. 37:25-26; 91:16; 92:12-14; Job 5:26; Prov. 9:10-11; 10:27; Ruth 4:13-15).⁵² Thus, blessings are a significant byproduct of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites.⁵³ In ancient Israel, one of the socio-religious functions of the elderly was to bless the

⁴⁹ J M Houston and Michael W Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 55.

⁵⁰ Joel A A Ajayi, *A Biblical Theology of Gerassapience*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2010). *Gerassapience* is a term he coined which means "old-age wisdom."

⁵¹ Ibid., 212

⁵² Ibid., 98.

⁵³ Ibid.

younger generations, as in the cases of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Joshua, just to name a few.

The Old Testament also describes old age both positively and negatively. Old age has contextual affinity with these qualities: wisdom (1Kgs. 12:6-14; Ezek. 7:26; 27:8-9; Ps. 105:22; 119:100; Job12:12; 32:4-13); honor and adornment (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Lev. 19:32; 1Chron. 29:28); glory and beauty (Prov. 16:31; 17:6).⁵⁴ Old age also represents exceptional achievement; it either indicates a person's importance or is integrated as a sign of divine favor, as in the case of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses among others. One who has lived a long life is described positively as "full of days" (Gen. 35:29; 1Chron. 23:1; 1Chron. 29:28; 2Chron. 24:15; Job 42:17) or "advanced in years" (Gen. 24:1; Josh. 13:1; 23:1, 2; 1Sam. 17:12; 1Kings 1:1).

However, the Old Testament also describes the reality of physical decline in old age, such as blindness, dimness, or dullness of the eyes (Gen27:1-2; 1 Sam. 2:22; 3:2); impairment of the ears (2 Sam. 19:36; Eccl. 12:4), fading senses of tastes and smells (2 Sam. 19:36; Job 12:20) and the statues of some other parts of the aging body as "trembling" or "shaking," (Eccl. 12:3, 5; 1 Kgs 1:1-4), "bent/crooked" posture (Eccl. 12:3), "loss of teeth" (Eccl. 12:3), weakened/stiffened/diseased legs/feet" (1 Kgs. 15:23; Eccl. 12:5), and walking with "staff in hand" as a third leg (Zech. 8:4).⁵⁵ But the Israelites were taught to respect and care for the elderly. In the Ten Commandments, the first command dealing with human relationship is the command to "honor your father and

⁵⁴ Ibid., 98-99.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

your mother.” (Ex. 20: 12) God promises that those who obey his commandments will be blessed with prosperity and longevity (Ps. 128: 4-6; Prov. 3:1-2; 4:10; 16:31).

The Old Testament provides a rather broad description of old age. It affirms that those who walk long in the counsel of God will gain wisdom and be blessed. The blessings bestowed by the elderly upon the younger generation were much valued. However, old age also comes with infirmities, though it might not necessarily mean biological decline as in the case of Moses and Caleb. (Deut. 34:7; Josh. 14:10-11)

New Testament

In contrast to the Old Testament, the New Testament seems to say very little about aging. There are two possible reasons for this. First, according to Tim Parkin’s *Roman Demography and Society*, life expectancy at birth was 25 years and only 5 to 10 percent of the population lived over the age of 60.⁵⁶ Second, for those who lived to advanced years, they were honored and esteemed within the community. Richard Hays and Judith Hays point out that aging was not seen by early Christians as a “problem” to which some sort of religious solution was required.⁵⁷

There are three Greek words that are related to people of advanced age: *Prebytes*, *Geron* and *Palaios*.

Presbytes is a descriptive term which Zechariah and Paul used to describe themselves as old men (Luke 1:18 and Philem. 9 respectively). Also in Titus 2:2-3, it is used to describe old men and women in the church in Crete. Its related term, *presbyteros*

⁵⁶ Tim G Parkin, *Demography and Roman Society* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 134.

⁵⁷ Judith Hays, Richard Hays and Hays, “The Christian Practice of Growing Old: The Witness of Scripture,” in *Growing Old In Christ*, ed. David. Hauerwas, Stanley, Stoneking, Carole Bailey, Meador, Keith G., Cloutier (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 3-4.

denotes those who are recognized as community leaders in the synagogue (Matt.21:23; Luke 7:3; Acts 25:15) or in the church (Acts 15:2; 1Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5; James5:14).

Geron also means old man, as in Nicodemus's conversation with Jesus (John3:4). Related terms include *geras*, which means old age (Luke 1:36) and the verb *gerasko* which means "to grow old" (John 21:18; Heb. 8:13). This term simply refers to chronological age without any of the connotations of dignity as attached to *presbytes/presbyteroi*.

Palaios, meaning ancient, has been in existence for a long time and has the connotation of being antiquated or outworn.⁵⁸ It is used to describe an old, torn garment or old, brittle wineskins (Mark 2:21-2); old leaven that is discarded in preparation for Passover (1Cor. 5:7); old covenant read in the synagogue (2 Cor. 3:14); or the old degenerate self to be put to death (Rom. 6:6) or removed like an outworn garment and replaced by a new identity in Christ (Eph. 4: 22; Col. 3:9). It was, however, never used to describe a person of advanced age.

None of these three Greek terms appear frequently, and it is obvious that older characters in the New Testament are few. However, though scarce, it is clear that older characters play a significant role in the Jewish community.

In the opening chapters of the gospel of Luke, Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth who were both "advanced in years," are the first two prominent figures in Luke's story who are said to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (1:41; 67). Two other aged characters who served as prophetic voices are Simeon and Anna. Simeon is described as speaking

⁵⁸ F. W Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, third ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 751.

under the guidance of the Spirit to declare Jesus as the Lord's chosen Messiah (2: 26, 27), and Anna is a prophetess who worshipped God night and day (2:37). They were exemplars of faith in the community.

In the epistles of Paul, there are not many passages concerning elderly characters. In Romans, Paul highlights Abraham's faith which remained strong even after a hundred years of living (Rom. 4: 19-20). Paul projects "Abraham as an exemplar of faith, not merely for elders but for the whole world."⁵⁹ In his letter to Timothy, Paul taught him to respect older men and women as father and mother (1Tim. 5:1-2). In Titus, Paul also considers older men and women as models for the younger generations (Tit. 2:3-5).

Hays noted that the things not said about older characters in the New Testament are equally important, writing that,

Nowhere in the biblical canon are they pitied, patronized, or treated with condescension. Nowhere is growing old itself described as a problem. Nowhere are elders described as pitiable, irrelevant, or behind the curve, as inactive or unproductive. Nowhere are they, as in so many Western dramas and narratives, lampooned as comic figures. On the contrary, they are seen as bearers of wisdom by virtue of their age.⁶⁰

Hence, elderly in the New Testament were much respected and well taken care of regardless of their chronological age.

In summary, old age in the Bible is a blessing from God, both to the community and to individuals. Elders enjoy respect from the community; they are looked upon as leaders and guides, and are often the peacemakers of the community. Undeniably, the majority of the aging process is accompanied by physical decline and frailty, but in a community of love and respect for the elderly there is no fear. The Apostle John states

⁵⁹ Hays, "The Christian Practice of Growing Old," 9.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 11.

that, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” (1 Jn. 4: 18) To love and be loved is to be in Christ. As the elderly continue to dwell in Christ, they will find wisdom, hope and love.

2.2.2 Aging Theories

Over the years, theories have been developed to understand the elderly in different ways: biological, social, psychological, and more recently, spiritual. Lewis Rambo states that while theories are valuable as they provide insights into the nature of a phenomenon, they are also limited by each presumption.⁶¹ As David Moberg cautions, “All theories are tools, not ends. Each has limitations, as well as strengths and virtues.”⁶²

The purpose of this review is to gather insights from these theories in order to better understand the elderly. Although this dissertation focuses on the sociocultural barriers encountered by the elderly when following Jesus, the biological and psychological factors also affect how they respond to the sociocultural context. Thus, this review includes a brief account of these various aspects.

Biological

Biological theories mostly aim at unravelling the myth of longevity. Research focuses on the variation of life spans in different species, individual differences in human life expectancy, age and the susceptibility to disease, and changes in functional capacity with age.⁶³ A key finding from the studies of biological aging is that chronological age is

⁶¹ Lewis R Rambo, “Theories of Conversion: Understanding and Interpreting Religious Change,” *Social Compass* 46, no. 3 (September 1, 1999): 259.

⁶² David O Moberg, “Spiritual Maturity and Wholeness in the Later Years,” *Journal of Religious Gerontology* 7, no. 1–2 (January 1, 1990): 12.

⁶³ James Lanum, Jackie and Birren, “Adult Development Theories and Concepts,” in *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook Vol. 1*, ed. E. James Kimble. Melvin and Birren (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 513.

not a good predictor of functional capacity. People of the same chronological age may differ dramatically in their functional age, which can be measured by biomarkers.⁶⁴ Biological factors that may contribute to the aging process include the heredity of certain genes, causation of wear and tear, the health of the immune system, and so forth.

Social

In the field of social science, the central concern of social theories is over the roles, norms, and socialization that prescribe the interactions between individuals and society.⁶⁵ One of the earliest theories of aging was the Disengagement Theory. In 1961, Elaine Cumming and William Henry proposed that “aging is an inevitable mutual withdrawal or disengagement, resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social systems he belongs to.”⁶⁶ They further explained that while the aging person withdraws from some classes of people, s/he remains relatively close to others and becomes more preoccupied with him/herself. An altered relationship, with a greater distance between the individual and his/her society, is constructed when the aging process is complete.⁶⁷

Gerontologists critiqued that this theory was evolved during the 1950s and reflected social conditions quite different from today. Harry Moody suggests that since this theory was rooted in the process of modernization, it assumed that the status of the elderly must decline as society became more modern and efficient; hence, it was natural

⁶⁴ Harry R Moody, *Aging: Concepts and Controversies* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2010), 17-18.

⁶⁵ Lanum, Jackie and Birren, “Adult Development Theories and Concepts,” 513.

⁶⁶ Elaine Cumming Henry and William Earl, *Growing Old* (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc, 1961), 14.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15

for the elderly to disengage from society.⁶⁸ Edar Rogler even refers to this theory as “a manifestation of ageism.”⁶⁹

The Activity Theory assumes that when one is more active in life, s/he is more likely to be satisfied with life. This theory claims that most elders continue with the roles and activities established in earlier life because they continue to have the same needs and values.⁷⁰ Analogously, the Continuity Theory notes that the elderly has the propensity of maintaining the same habits, personalities, and life styles developed in earlier years. Havighurst, Neugarten and Tobin also argued that any decrease in social interaction is better explained by personality than by some functional need of society to disengage older people from their prior roles.⁷¹ These theories seem to suggest that the development of the elderly ceases at the middle age. Hence, the social segregation of the elderly is often treated as a norm.

There are further biological and social theories of aging that are not discussed in this section. Readers are referred to the appendix where Susan McFadden summarizes these theories in two charts.⁷² These charts are helpful in understanding the key concerns and assumptions of these theories.

Psychological

Research in psychology is mainly on two aspects: classical academics and clinical research. In the classical academics, the psychologist uses scientific methods to examine

⁶⁸ Moody, *Aging: Concepts and Controversies*, 9.

⁶⁹ Edar Y Rogler, “(B)old: Theological Perspective on Spiritual Formation for Aging,” *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* 22, no. 1/2 (January 2010): 12–26.

⁷⁰ Moody, *Aging: Concepts and Controversies*, 11.

⁷¹ Sheldon Neugarten, Bernice, Havighurst, Robert and Tobin, “Personality and Patterns of Aging,” in *Middle Age and Aging: A Reader in Social Psychology*, ed. Bernice L Neugarten (Chicago, London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), 177.

⁷² Lanum and Birren, “Adult Development Theories and Concepts,” 514 - 515

the epistemology of earlier psychologists, giving rise to research on perception, learning, memory, attention and problem solving. On the other hand, clinical research centers on developmental behavior that determines what is normal and abnormal.⁷³ In this aspect, Erik Erikson and Joan Erikson's theory provides an understanding of the psychosocial barriers related to old age.

Building on Sigmund Freud's five stages of psychoanalysis (1924), Erik Erikson became the first researcher to extend the concept of stages derived from psychoanalytic theory, from childhood to adulthood.⁷⁴ Erikson placed much more importance on social forces than Freud and characterized stages according to the *psychosocial* crises that needed to be resolved at each period of human development. He divided these periods into eight stages.⁷⁵ He believed that every human being has to overcome a psychosocial conflict in every stage of their life in order to reach his or her full development. Later, after his death, Joan Erikson elaborated on the ninth stage that was missing in his last book, *The Life Cycle Completed*. She states that the Ninth Stage, *Old Age*, is the final stage of life that "demands one to garner and lean on all previous experience, maintaining awareness and creativity with a new grace."⁷⁶

In other words, the Ninth Stage does not involve the addition of a ninth psychosocial conflict; instead, it is a recurrence of the previous eight psychosocial conflicts. As one loses physical ability, his/her independence and control are challenged while self-esteem and confidence are weakened, consequently necessitating the

⁷³ Ibid., 516

⁷⁴ Ibid., 520

⁷⁵ Erik H. Erikson and Joan M. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed: Extended Version with New Chapters on the Ninth Stage of Development*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 5.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 9.

reestablishment of hope and trust. In the Ninth Stage, Anna Erikson points out that the dystonic (negative element) are more dominant than the syntonc (positive element) when compared to the previous eight stages of life.⁷⁷ The eight pairs of psychosocial conflicts and the resulting attributes in the Ninth stage include:

- 1 Mistrust VS. Trust: Hope
- 2 Shame and Doubt VS. Autonomy: Will
- 3 Guilt VS. Initiative: Purpose
- 4 Inferiority VS. Industry: Competence
- 5 Identity Confusion VS. Identity: Fidelity
- 6 Isolation VS. Intimacy: Love
- 7 Stagnation VS. Generativity: Care
- 8 Despair and Disgust VS. Integrity: Wisdom

Erikson helps envisage old age as the most challenging stage; overwhelmed by dystonic, it needs extra attention. If the psychosocial conflicts in the other stages of the life cycle are not properly dealt with, old age is detrimental!

In a more hopeful and positive light, Lars Tornstam's Theory of Gerotranscendence contends that old age can be "a shift in meta-perspective, from a materialistic and pragmatic view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally accompanied by an increase in life satisfaction."⁷⁸ He further explains that

⁷⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁷⁸ Lars Tornstam, "Gerotranscendence: The Contemplative Dimension of Aging," *Journal of Aging Studies* 11, no. 2 (1997).

“human aging includes a potential to mature into a new outlook on and understanding of life.”⁷⁹ The theory of Gerotranscendence emphasizes on “change and development.”⁸⁰

Tornstam conducted research in various parts of the world to evaluate this theory. He estimated that only 20 percent of the population automatically reaches a high degree of gerotranscendence.⁸¹ One of the reasons for this situation is that many people believe that old age should involve a continuation of the same values, interests, and activities of midlife, but then stop at this developmental process.⁸² Tornstam explained why people cannot experience gerotranscendence as

Maturation is a lifelong process ... it is a tragedy that many of us live our entire lives with the erroneous idea that it is only during the first half of life that we develop and mature. Practicing such a way of life ends up in our dying as only half-matured individuals.⁸³

This perspective speaks against other social theories and ideology that propagates old age as disengaging, insisting on continuity or activities. Such theories which implicitly inculcate ageism become a barrier in preventing the elderly from maturing into gerotranscendence.

Spiritual

Different theories are often employed to explain how spirituality or religion *benefits* older people.⁸⁴ However, when spirituality is approached in this manner, one must be careful that spirituality does not become just another tool to achieve success in

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Lars Tornstam, “Maturing into Gerotranscendence,” *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 43, no. 2 (December 2011): 166–180.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 176–177.

⁸⁴ Konrad J Noronha, “Impact of Religion and Spirituality on Older Adulthood,” *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* 27, no. 1 (January 2015), 16–33; Helen Lavretsky, *Resilience and Aging: Research and Practice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 94.

aging. In this case, success becomes *the ends* and spirituality or religion, *a means*.

However, these theories do enhance the understanding of spirituality and aging.

Joseph Pickard uses John Bowlby's Attachment Theory to assess the four different relational styles of the Transcendent. Attachment is described as a relationship or bond that one person feels for another person even when the other is not present.⁸⁵ Individual styles of attachment are generally thought to be consistent throughout the course of life.⁸⁶ In the context of relationship, four styles were found:

- 1 Secure style: Individual who views self and others positively
- 2 Dismissing style: Individual who views self positively but others negatively.
- 3 Preoccupied style: Individual who views self negatively but others positively.
- 4 Fearful/Avoidant style: Individual who views self and others negatively.⁸⁷

At one end of the spectrum, research on how different attachment styles respond to the Transcendent was conducted.⁸⁸ These research studies found out that those with a secure attachment style were significantly less likely than the other insecure groups to find a new relationship with the Transcendent. However, when the secure style individual established a relationship with the Transcendent, s/he was more likely to develop a closer relationship with the transcendent than those who display insecure styles.

⁸⁵ Joseph G Pickard and Holly Nelson-Becker, "Attachment and Spiritual Coping: Theory and Practice With Older Adults.," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 13, no. 2 (April 2011): 138–155.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁸⁷ Kim Bartholomew and Leonard M Horowitz, "Attachment Styles among Young Adults: A Test of a Four-Category Model.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61, no. 2 (August 1991): 226–244.

⁸⁸ 143.

On the other end of the spectrum, individuals with a fearful/avoidant style were more likely to have sudden conversion experience than the other groups. In contrast, the secure group was least likely to experience the large, emotional upheaval of a religious conversion experience.⁸⁹

Although all the above theories have their presumptions and contexts, they contribute to the understanding of aging. The heterogeneity of elderly people is ever-increasing. Often, the aim of science is to search for normative views that emphasize generalities rather than particularities. But like all sciences, the understanding of aging and the elderly is always in the process of new discoveries.

2.3 Singapore Context, Chinese Population and Aging Policies

This section focuses on the elderly as well as the changing social context of Singapore, with emphasis on the Chinese. Aging policies will be described from the 1980s through the present.

2.3.1 Singapore Context

Although Singapore gained independence in 1965, the building of the nation started years before. Most historians trace the history of Singapore from 1819 when Stamford Raffles secured a treaty with the Temenggong and the Sultan of Johore.⁹⁰ Singapore was transformed into a British Trading post for the British East India Company, and later became a British colony. Before its inception, the 225-square-mile

⁸⁹ Pickard and Nelson-Becker, "Attachment and Spiritual Coping: Theory and Practice With Older Adults," 146.

⁹⁰ Donald Moore and Joanna Moore, *The First 150 Years of Singapore*, ([Singapore: Donald Moore Press; [distributed by Cellar Book Shop, Detroit, Mich.], 1969); C M Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819-2005*. (Singapore : NUS Press., 2009).

island was practically uninhabited, with only 120 Malays and 20 to 30 Chinese.⁹¹ In less than four months, the population surged to 5,000.

In 1826, Singapore became a British colony. Later, during the Second World War, Singapore was occupied by the Japanese (1942 to 1945); an estimated 5,000 to 25,000 Chinese were executed by the Japanese.⁹² After the war, the British returned to rule until 1959, when the People's Action Party (PAP) won the first general election. Under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore was declared as a self-governing territory within the British Commonwealth. As a small island without natural resources, the PAP worked towards a merger with the newly independent Federation of Malaya in order to survive economically. Although the union was established in 1963, heated ideological conflicts between the two governments led Singapore to be expelled from the union on August 9th 1965.

This sudden independence forced the government to address immediate challenges – the development of the economic and the establishment of a sense of nationhood and solidarity. Since a majority of the nation's population was comprised of immigrants, the government had no indigenous tradition and structure of government to draw upon.⁹³ Economic survival became the core of national development. B. H. Chua observes that, "Everything that stood in the way of economic development was removed

⁹¹ James Y K Wong, *Singapore: The Church in the Midst of Social Change* (Singapore: Church Growth Study Centre, 1973), 13.

⁹² Barbara Leitch Lepoer, "Singapore: A Country Study," *Library of Congress Country Studies*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, accessed May 4, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/item/90025755/>.

⁹³ B. H. Chua, "Racial Singaporeans," in *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, ed. Joel S Kahn (New York : St. Martin's Press ; Singapore : Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998), 30.

without any sentimentality, as creative destruction necessitated by capitalist development.”⁹⁴

From an anthropological perspective, Clifford Geertz states that the peoples of new states are animated by two powerful, thoroughly interdependent, yet distinctive and opposing motives: a search for an identity and a demand for progress. In the process of nation-building the primordial sentiment of identity roots was suppressed. Singapore’s national identity was framed by the metanarrative of industrial-capitalist modernity.⁹⁵

For example, this is demonstrated by policy on language. Being a multi-racial and multi-religious nation, choosing one language for official and general use was a sensitive issue. Before independence in 1959, Malay was picked to be the national language in preparation for merger with Malaya.⁹⁶ However, the Chinese constituted 75% of the population after independence from Malaysia in 1965. As such, the Malay language ceased to be promoted as the national language in 1966.⁹⁷ But instead of Chinese, the government perceived the economic value of English and made it the language of the workplace and the common language among Malays, Indians and Chinese. The Chinese, being the majority, were suspicious of government’s efforts to marginalize Chinese language.

Promoting English as the official language could easily be mistaken for discarding the Chinese cultural identity. In 1970, the major Chinese paper, *Nanyang Siang Pau*,

⁹⁴ B. H. Chua, “Forward,” in *The Scripting of a National History: Singapore and Its Pasts*, ed. Hong, Lysa (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), ix.

⁹⁵ C J Wan-ling, Wee, “The Asian Modern Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore” (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 6.

⁹⁶ Kuan Yew Lee, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, 170.

⁹⁷ C J Wan-Ling Wee, “Capitalism and Ethnicity: Creating ‘Local’ Culture in Singapore,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (April 2000), 133.

accused the government of suppressing Chinese language, education and culture. Lee Kuan Yew, the prime minister at that time, was portrayed as the oppressor in a government of “pseudo foreigners who forgot their ancestors.”⁹⁸ Consequently, the government arrested the general manager, editor-in-chief, and the senior writer for “glamorizing communism and stirring up chauvinistic sentiments over Chinese language and culture.”⁹⁹

In 1978, the “Speak Mandarin” campaign was launched to change the language habits of Chinese families; all dialect programs were banned from the media. For many Chinese, one’s dialect is the mother tongue and Mandarin a stepmother tongue. But as a result of this policy, Mandarin became the mother tongue. As Singapore enters the 21st century, the use of dialects has almost disappeared among the young generation. In the memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew published in 2010, Lee writes,

English as our working language has prevented conflicts arising between our different races and given us a competitive advantage because it is the international language of business and diplomacy, of science and technology. Without it, we would not have many of the world’s multinationals and over 200 of the world’s top banks in Singapore. Nor would our people have taken so readily to computers and the internet.¹⁰⁰

Apparently, Lee’s politics never lost focus on the economics in the face of cultural sensitivities and conflicts. Phyllis Chew nuanced that “economic success and nationhood have become one and the same thing” in Singapore.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Kuan Yew Lee, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, 172.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 181

¹⁰¹ Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew, “Islands and National Identity: The Metaphors of Singapore.,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2000, no. 143 (May 2000), 134-135.

In order to fight for survival globally, Singapore focused on economic success. Hence, meritocracy and competitiveness were inscribed upon the identity of the Singaporean. Chua comments, “By the end of the twentieth century ‘success’ has become part of that identity and boast of the island-nation and its people.”¹⁰²

2.3.2 Chinese Population in Singapore

As mentioned, the population in Singapore began to grow with the influx of immigrants in the 1820s. Immigrants were mostly Chinese from the southern regions of China. During that period, China was politically and socially unstable. Western nations and Japan inflicted multiple military defeats, and China was obliged to sign many unequal treaties. The upheavals in China forced many Chinese to leave the country and many never returned. Moore commented that “what was China’s deluge was Singapore’s harvest.”¹⁰³ In 1927, the total number of Chinese immigrants reached 360,000.¹⁰⁴

Between 1824 and 1970, Chinese in Singapore grew from 31 percent to over 76 percent of the population. James Wong commented that, “in all respects, Singapore was a Chinese city.”¹⁰⁵ The demographic composition in the 1900s resembles the post-independence Singapore, with the Chinese population maintaining around 76 percent of the population; Malay, 15; Indians, 7, and other races, 2.¹⁰⁶

Although the Chinese are the largest population group, Chinese immigrants were very diverse. This was reflected in their different dialects. There were a total of 26 different Chinese dialects reported in 1972, the top three being Hokkien, Cantonese, and

¹⁰² Chua, “Foreword,” ix.

¹⁰³ Moore and Moore, *The First 150 Years of Singapore*, 491.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Wong, *Singapore: The Church in the Midst of Social Change*, 16.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Teochew.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, some immigrants and most local-born Chinese only spoke English, resulting in the complexity of the Chinese population. In the 1970s, English was employed as the working language among the ethnic groups, creating a distinction between the Chinese-speaking and the English-speaking Chinese.

Eugene Tan pointed out that this distinction is not merely in language preference but also in “value system and intrinsic loyalties.”¹⁰⁸ Tan characterized the Chinese-speaking group as “providing the critical cultural and moral ballast needed by a disciplined society for its continued loyalties.”¹⁰⁹

In 1978, the government launched the “Speak Mandarin” campaign.”¹¹⁰ Thereafter, Chinese dialects have almost disappeared from the mass media, except the newscasts. The dialect-speaking Chinese, though a loyal group, were further marginalized socially. In this dissertation, about 90% of the informants belong to this social group.

The government implemented many policies with good intention. However, some of these policies are double-edged swords that have done as much harm as they have done good. In the next section, policies that impact this group of elderly will be discussed.

¹⁰⁷ Homer Jernigan and Margaret Jernigan, *Aging in Chinese Society: A Holistic Approach to the Experience of Aging in Taiwan and Singapore* (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 1992), 15.

¹⁰⁸ Eugene K B Tan, “Re-Engaging Chineseness: Political, Economic and Cultural Imperatives of Nation-Building in Singapore [article],” *China Quarterly VO - 2003*, 758.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Kuan Yew Lee, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, 179.

2.3.3 Aging Policies

The population of the elderly in Singapore is rapidly increasing due to three factors that require government policy intervention. First, post-war baby boomers (those born between 1947 and 1964) will be 65 years or older by 2030. Second, Singaporeans are living longer due to improvements in health and nutrition. Third, birth rate is declining.¹¹¹

Since the early 1980s, several government bodies have been established to address the growing elderly population. These include the Committee on Problems of the Aged formed in 1982, and the National Advisory Council on the Aged formed in 1988. And most recently, the Inter-Ministrial Committee on Aging Population (1998), succeeded by the Committee on Aging Issues (2004), were set up to review and make policies in preparation for the aging population.

The vision of these current governing bodies is to develop, by the end of the millennia, a successful policy for aging in Singapore. Reports from both committees explain successful aging in terms of the well-preparedness for the challenges and opportunities in an aging Singapore. On the individual level, older Singaporeans should be healthy, active, and secure. They should be able to age with respect and dignity, and lead independent and fulfilling lives as integral members of their families and communities.¹¹² The family is proposed as the first line for support, both physical and emotional since these needs are best met by one's family. On the corporate level, the

¹¹¹ "Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) Report on the Ageing Population - Ministry of Social and Family Development," accessed April 29, 2015, <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Research-Room/Research-Statistics/IMC-Report-on-the-Ageing-Population>.

¹¹² Ibid., 15.

community, VWOs (Voluntarily Welfare Organizations), and government will serve as secondary support to provide a range of comprehensive services to support the family.¹¹³

In 2014, the government expressed the need to shift the conversation from a focus on the challenges of aging towards a greater celebration of longevity. The Ministerial Committee on Aging thus now coordinates a nationwide effort to put together a coherent national agenda in preparation for successful aging.¹¹⁴ In March 2015, Minister of Health Kim Yong Gan announced that the government's vision of Singapore's future is "an ageless nation." He highlighted three areas that will be improved to build a nation for all ages: workplace, healthcare and the city itself.¹¹⁵ The following segments depict the key aging policies that have been implemented through the years and the state of the elderly as reflected in two surveys conducted in 2011 and 2014.

Family-Related Policies

Family forms the core of support for the elderly in Singapore. Homer Jernigan and Margaret Jernigan observed that the policies for the elderly reflect the view that the primary role of the government is to enable elders to live with their families and to be supported by them as long as possible.¹¹⁶ Angelique Chan also noted that the government has been careful to adopt policies that enhance family support rather than replace it.¹¹⁷ In June 1996, the Maintenance of Parents' Act was set up. This allows parents to take legal

¹¹³ "Report of the Committee on Ageing Issues, 2006 - Ministry of Social and Family Development."

¹¹⁴ Mathew Mathews and Pauline Tay Straughan, "Results from the Perception and Attitudes towards Aging and Seniors Survey 2013/2014," 9, *Council for Third Age*, accessed April 25, 2015, http://www.c3a.org.sg/Aboutus_surveysdetails.do?id=1216.

¹¹⁵ "Speech by Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister for Health, at the SG50 Scientific Conference on Ageing, on 19 March 2015 | Ministry of Health," accessed May 18, 2015, https://www.moh.gov.sg/content/moh_web/home/pressRoom/speeches_d/2015/speech-by-mr-gan-kim-yong--minister-for-health--at-the-sg50-scie.html.

¹¹⁶ Jernigan, *Aging in Chinese Society: A Holistic Approach to the Experience of Aging in Taiwan and Singapore*, 98.

¹¹⁷ Angelique Chan, *Social Policies for the Aged in Singapore*, 79.

action against their children for financial neglect. However, the number of cases presented to the tribunal has never been more than 150 cases per year.¹¹⁸

Old-age economic support is one of the central concerns of the government in addressing the aging issue. The Central Provident Fund (CPF) was established as early as 1955. This is a system where employees contribute part of their monthly income to build up their retirement savings; an employer's contribution makes up the total of the employee's gross income. Contribution rates are periodically reviewed and adjusted according to economic growth and social needs. (As illustrated in Table 2.1)

Three different accounts were created, namely the ordinary, special and Medisave accounts. In 1968, the Public Housing Scheme was introduced and entitled Singaporeans to use their CPF's ordinary account to pay for their housing mortgages. The Special Account was introduced in the 1970s to provide for a more targeted accumulation of saving for retirement. In 1984, a certain percentage of CPF was set aside as the Medisave Account for hospitalization expenses. Table 2-1 shows the CPF contribution rates and distribution in the three accounts as in Jan 1st 2015:

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Employee's Age (Years)	Contribution Rate (%) (For monthly wages \geq S\$750)			Credited to		
	Contribution by Employer	Contribution by Employee	Total Contribution	Ordinary Account	Special Account	Medisave Account
35 and below	17	20	37	23	6	8
Above 35-45	17	20	37	21	7	9
Above 45-50	17	20	37	19	8	10
Above 50-55	16	19	35	14	10.5	10.5
Above 55-60	12	13	25	12	2.5	10.5
Above 60-65	8.5	7.5	16	3.5	2	10.5
Above 65	7.5	5	12.5	1	1	10.5

Table 2-1 CPF Contribution Rate (Source: Central Provident Fund Board)

Some observers have questioned whether this single-tier mandatory saving scheme is sufficient for support in old age, and pointed out that the CPF has been wrongly perceived as a social security scheme.¹¹⁹ M. Ramesh estimated that about 20 percent of the labor force is not covered by the CPF due to their temporary or low-wage employment.¹²⁰ The net balance of members' account who did not reach the minimum balance will have to resort to private savings and family for support.

According to the survey, most of the elderly cited income transfers from children as one of their main sources of income (see Table 2-2). However, between 1995 and 2011, the proportion of elderly citing income transfers from children as the top main income source declined by about 20 per cent, while that of paid employment rose about 10 per cent.¹²¹ This corresponded to an increase in the employment of the elderly over

¹¹⁹ Mukul G Asher and Amarendu Nandy, "Singapore's Policy Responses to Ageing, Inequality and Poverty: An Assessment.," *International Social Security Review* 61, no. 1 (January 2008): 41–60.

¹²⁰ M Ramesh, "The Politics of Social Security in Singapore.," *Pacific Review* 13, no. 2 (June 2000): 243–256.

¹²¹ "National Survey of Senior Citizens 2011 - Ministry of Social and Family Development," accessed March 13, 2015, <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Publications/National-Survey-of-Senior-Citizens-2011>.

the same period, which probably eased their dependency on their children. This shows that elderly Singaporeans are becoming more financially independent.

Source	Total Age 55 and above	
	2005	2011
Income transfer from children	66	66.7
Personal saving	36.7	47.2
Paid employment	26.2	38.9
CPF saving	13.9	6.7
Income transfers from spouse	11.9	14.9
Income transfers from other family members	2.5	4.0
Rental income	1.3	2.6
Public and government assistance	1.2	1.8

Table 2-2 Main source of Income in year 2005, 2011 (Source: The National Survey of Senior Citizens in Singapore 2011)

Government policies also encourage co-residence with family members. A variety of tax and financial incentives were instituted such as tax relief and priority housing to adult children who live with, or nearby, elderly parents. Those first-time HDB flat¹²² buyers are eligible for a S\$40,000 housing grant when buying a flat within 2 kilometers (1.24 miles) near their parents' home.¹²³ In addition, adult children receive an income tax reduction of S\$3,500 for maintenance of each parent and S\$4,500 for those who live with parents.

According to the survey, a majority of the elderly lives with their spouse and children (32.6%). However, there is a changing trend in living arrangement. The data shows that there is a sharp increase of 12 percent of elderly living on their own, as well as an increase in the proportion of elderly married couples living on their own without their

¹²² HDB flats are government housing built by the Housing Development Board. 80 percent of Singaporeans live in HDB flats.

¹²³ "HDB InfoWEB: CPF Housing Grant for Family: Buying a Resale Flat," accessed May 21, 2015, <http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10321p.nsf/w/BuyResaleFlatCPFGrantFamily?OpenDocument>.

children. This suggests that despite government incentives, most elderly parents still end up living by themselves. In such cases, the emotional need of the elderly cannot be met by the children.

Living arrangement	2011	1995
Total	100.0 %	100.0%
Living alone	14.9	3.1
Living with spouse only	12.2	5.2
Living with spouse and children, no grandchildren	32.6	37.1
Living with spouse and grandchildren, no children	0.7	0
Living with spouse and children and grandchildren	6.5	12.1
Living with children and/or grandchildren, no spouse	4.5	37.0
Other living arrangements	28.6	5.6

Table 2-3 Living arrangement, 2011 and 1995 (%)(Source: The National Survey of Senior Citizens in Singapore 2011)

Another policy attempts to meet the emotional needs of the elderly and maximize social resources is to enable them to age in place. Singapore's concept of "aging in place" refers to the elderly being able to live in the community, in their own homes, without ever having to move out. It involves developing strong social networks involving families and friends and providing care and social services so that the elderly can continue to live in the community for as long as possible without having to be institutionalized in an aged or nursing home.¹²⁴

In order to create a friendlier environment for the elderly to age in place, the older HDB housing estates are being upgraded with friendly features such as lifts at every floor, non-slip flooring in the bathroom, corridor railings and wheelchair access.¹²⁵ Also, the transport system has been made more senior friendly, while home-care services and

¹²⁴ "Report on the State of the Elderly, Release 3, On Social Well Being - Ministry of Social and Family Development."

¹²⁵ "Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) Report on the Ageing Population, 1999 - Ministry of Social and Family Development," accessed March 13, 2015, <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Publications/IMC-Report-on-the-Ageing-Population>.

senior care centers are established in the neighborhood to keep the elderly in the community when they become frail.¹²⁶

While the government is creating a more conducive place for the elderly by improving facilities and services, a distinct majority of elderly are ironically unaware of their existence, especially those with little or no education. Table 2-4 shows that awareness of the presence of these services is as low as 12.1 percent.

Eldercare services	Percent
Nursing home	96.6
Community-based centers	78.7
Community hospital	70.4
Hospice care/respite care services	59.9
Home-base services	54.5
Center for Enabled Living (CEL)	13.2
Agency for Integrated Care (AIC)	12.1

Table 2-4 Awareness of services that cater specifically to the needs of older person
(Source: The National Survey of Senior Citizens in Singapore 2011)

In summary, although these policies aim to meet the financial, social and emotional needs of the elderly, they were still unable to respond to the rapid changing context of Singapore.

Workplace-Related Policies

In 1993, the Retired Age Bill was introduced, raising the retirement age from 55 to 62 in January 1999.¹²⁷ In 2012, the Re-employment Legislation was enacted, requiring employers to offer re-employment opportunities to employees who have reached the

¹²⁶ “Speech by Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister for Health, at the SG50 Scientific Conference on Ageing, on 19 March 2015 | Ministry of Health.”

¹²⁷ “Possibility of Doing Away with the Retirement Age - Ministry of Social and Family Development,” accessed March 13, 2015, <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Press-Room/Possibility-of-Doing-Away-with-the-Retirement-Age>.

retirement age so that they can work until the age of 65.¹²⁸ Simultaneously, the government has also developed retraining programs for older adults. Harnessing the productivity of older workers is a viable approach to countering the increasing dependency ratio.¹²⁹

Between 2005 and 2011, the proportion of elderly who were employed increased. The growth in labor force participation among the elderly can be accounted for by these factors: rising educational attainment, the need to supplement the retirement savings and other income sources, and as mentioned, effective government policies implemented to enhance employment of the elderly.¹³⁰ However, as reflected in the data (Table 2-5), the main reason for continuing to work or returning to work is still related to money.

Reason	2005	2011
Need money for current expenses	62.0	55.1
Need money for future financial security	4.9	19.4
Do not want to be dependent on others for money	5.6	5.8
No one to depend for money	1.2	2.4
Want to lead active life	14.1	10.7
Need something to occupy time	7.0	6.0
Own family business	0	0.5

Table 2-5 Main reason for working/returning to work in year 2005 and 2011 (Source: The National Survey of Senior Citizens in Singapore 2011)

Between 2005 and 2011, the need for current expenses has decreased by 7% but the need for future financial security has risen by 15%. Given the rise in the cost of living and increasing medical needs, it is not surprising that the elderly do not feel financial secure for the future.

¹²⁸ "National Survey of Senior Citizens 2011 - Ministry of Social and Family Development," 1.

¹²⁹ Angelique Chan, "Social Policies for the Aged in Singapore," 88.

¹³⁰ "National Survey on Senior Citizens 2011," vi

In terms of ageism in the workplace, 64% of the surveyed elderly experienced or heard of some form of age discrimination compared to 36 percent of those who were not working.¹³¹ This might be because the workplace is an environment where discussion of age discrimination might be more common.¹³²

In general, the data also shows that nearly three quarters of the elderly have not been prejudicially treated because of their age. Minister for Health Kim Yong Gan noted that the critical determinant is the “the ageless mindset.”¹³³ Aging should not be associated with mere decline, loss of value or disability. Although good health and financial well-being are very important, these by themselves do not necessary lead to successful aging. Having the right attitude toward aging is the potent ingredient for successful aging.¹³⁴

2.4 Elderly Religious Conversion

What are the reasons for religious change among the Chinese elderly? As there are limited resources in Singapore that address this question, this review will first report on why Christianity is more appealing than traditional religion¹³⁵ as the Chinese elderly in Singapore are mostly traditionalists before becoming Christian. Second, this section reviews a study conducted on religious change among the American elderly in year 2000;

¹³¹ Mathews and Straughan,, “Results from the Perception and Attitudes towards Aging and Seniors Survey (2013/2014),” 50.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ “Speech by Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister for Health, at the SG50 Scientific Conference on Ageing, on 19 March 2015 | Ministry of Health.”

¹³⁴ Kwame Addae-Sapaah and Tey Chee Ying, “Are Singaporeans Aging Successfully?,” in *Global Aging Issues and Policies: Understanding the Importance of Comprehending and Studying the Aging Process*, ed. Yushi (Boni) Li (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C Thomas, Publisher, Ltd, 2013).

¹³⁵ In the Chinese context of Singapore, traditional religion refers to folk religion that intermingles with Daoism and Buddhism.

insights will be drawn from this study for the Singaporean context. Third, and lastly, a statistical analysis on the religious change in Singapore will be presented.

2.4.1 Religious change from Traditional religion to Christianity

Studies on conversion to Christianity or other world religions point to one primary factor: rationalization. Many scholars build on Max Weber's work when trying to understand religious change. Weber stated that the key distinction between traditional religions and world religions is the superior rationalization of the latter.¹³⁶ Traditional religion is a basic response to the "mundane, worldly concerns: health, long life, defeat of enemies, good relations with one's own people and the like."¹³⁷ In contrast, Weber argues that because world religions formulate comprehensive responses to the ethical, emotional, and intellectual challenges of human life, world religions acquire a broader appeal, whereas traditional religions emphasizes aspects of basic human needs.

Robert Bellah as well asserts that traditional religions are so this-worldly orientated that they provide very little intellectual leverage, leaving them incapable of challenging the status quo.¹³⁸ Additionally, Clifford Geertz also observes that traditional religions "rigidly stereotyped social practices," and bound up with secular custom in an "almost point-to-point manner."¹³⁹ World religions show "greater conceptual generalization, tighter formal integration, and a more explicit sense of doctrine."¹⁴⁰ As

¹³⁶ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1956), 118-119.

¹³⁷ Robert Hefner, *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 8.

¹³⁸ Robert N Bellah, "Religious Evolution," *American Sociological Review* VO - 29, no. 3 (1964): 358.

¹³⁹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures : Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 172.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

Robert Hefner summaries, “World religions have the capacity to remake the world rather than passively accept it.”¹⁴¹

In the context of Singapore, Chee Kiong Tong argues that younger Singaporeans become Christian due to the rationality of Christianity when compared to the traditional religions. With quantitative and qualitative research, he pointed out that in Singapore, there is a process of intellectualization of religion where individuals shift from an unthinking and passive acceptance of religion to one where there is a tendency to search for a religion that they regard as systematic, logical, and relevant.¹⁴² Adding to this, Clive Shuck-Lung Chin reported that young Singaporeans also convert to Christianity because they do not conceive Christianity as a Western religion or one that obscures their identity as a Singaporean or Chinese.¹⁴³

An earlier study (1970s) on religious change in Singapore was analyzed through the lenses of religious intermarriage, social mobility and cultural crisis. Joseph Tamney and Riaz Hassan found out that young university students changed their religion because of cultural crisis. This was reflected through the statistic that 67 percent of the students claimed to have no religion while their parents were Traditionalists. They further explained that while Chinese students from religious backgrounds rejected their parents’ religion, they nevertheless remained interested in religion.¹⁴⁴ The sense of cultural crisis

¹⁴¹ Hefner, *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, 9.

¹⁴² Chee Kiong Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore Society*, *Social science in Asia*: v. 13 (Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2007), 4.

¹⁴³ Clive Shuck-Lung Chin, “The Perception of Christianity as a Rational Religion in Singapore: A Missiological Analysis of Christian Conversion,” (Trinity International University, 2014), iv.

¹⁴⁴ Joseph B Tamney and Riaz Hassan, *Religious Switching in Singapore: A Study of Religious Mobility*, (Singapore: Select Books, 1987), 15.

was more common among students who were better educated.¹⁴⁵ In some ways, this finding still echoes with the rationalizing process of religious change.

But this raises the question of what age religious change most likely occurs? Since the 19th century, research has suggested that religious conversion is “a distinctly adolescent phenomenon.”¹⁴⁶ In the 1890s, Edwin Starbuck studied over a thousand people and concluded that “conversion usually occurred at seven or eight years old, and increase in number gradually to 10 or 11, and then rapidly to 16; rapidly decline to 20, and gradually fall away after that, and become rare after 30.”¹⁴⁷ Elmer Clark (1929) and Gordon Allport (1956) also make similar comments that religious awakening usually happened during adolescence.¹⁴⁸ As such, these findings have unintentionally fostered the lack of interest in studying elderly conversion for more than a century, leading in turn to a void in literature.

2.4.2 Religious change among the American elderly

Win Arn (1993) in a reversal of trend, points out that elderly typically experience a high number of “life-transition” events that provide “windows of opportunities” for evangelism.¹⁴⁹ In the study of spiritual development in later life, Linda Vogel notes that there is a potential for all persons to grow towards wholeness; thus the elderly can still be transformed.¹⁵⁰ In an 11-year longitudinal study, David Hayward and Neal Krause report

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 39

¹⁴⁶ Edwin Diller Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Study of the Growth of Religious Consciousness* (London, 1911), 28, accessed 2015 March 13
<https://archive.org/details/psychologyofreli00star>

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Tamney and Hassan, *Religious Switching in Singapore: A Study of Religious Mobility*. 42

¹⁴⁹ Win. Arn and Charles. Arn, *Catch the Age Wave: A Handbook for Effective Ministry with Senior Adults* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1993), 79.

¹⁵⁰¹⁵⁰ Linda Vogel, “Spiritual Development in Later Life,” in Kimble and Birren, *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook Volume 1*.

that changes in religious affiliation are relatively prevalent within the course of older adulthood in contrary to the assumption that older adulthood is a life stage that is primarily stagnant.¹⁵¹

In view of this potential and the rapidly aging population in the United States, Charles Arn and the Institute of American Church Growth conducted a nation-wide quantitative survey on how and why older adults change their religious behavior.¹⁵² The prime reason for religious conversion appears to be the influence of family members and friends. Relationships are still the key to effect conversion. Arn highlights that those relationships that did not pressurize people to make decision won converts.¹⁵³

The second reason for elderly conversion is church services and programs that call people to take a deeper spiritual walk. Arn notes that older adults who have church experience when they are young are more likely to take the initiative to visit a church service than younger adults.

The third factor is that elderly feel a need to return to the values and faith that they had laid aside earlier in life. Other factors include the personality of the pastor, personal life crises, and others as shown in the chart (See Table 2-6). Gender differences are also taken into consideration.

¹⁵¹ Hayward and Krause, "Changes in Religious Group Affiliation During Older Adulthood: Evidence from an 11-Year Longitudinal Study," 550.

¹⁵² Charles. Arn, *White unto Harvest : Evangelizing Today's Senior Adults* (Monrovia, CA: Institute for American Church Growth, 2003), 21.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 48

Motivation	Male %	Female %
Family members	55%	18%
Church service, program or special event	41%	66%
Return to values and faith	48%	37%
Pastor or church staff person	40%	44%
Personal Crisis	44%	29%
Act of God	37%	18%
Christian friend	32%	15%

Table 2-6 Motivation for Christian Commitment ¹⁵⁴

As life transitions open windows of opportunity for change, the research also includes life-impacting events that happened before their conversion. These events include major physical problems, deaths of spouses, divorce, remarriage, retirement, lack of personal roles, marital reconciliation, and confinement to retirement homes among others. ¹⁵⁵

With an understanding of American elderly in terms of evangelism, Arn advocates Target Group Evangelism. This is

A strategy of outreach that identifies one or more segments of a surrounding community and then researches, communicates with and build bridges to people in that group with the goal of reaching them for Christ and the church. ¹⁵⁶

In order to reach out to the unchurched elderly effectively, Arn puts forth a seven outreach steps for evangelism to the elderly:

Outreach step one: Clarify the goal of your evangelistic endeavors.

Outreach step two: Develop a “potential disciple” list.

Outreach step three: Build bridges to your “extended community.”

Outreach step four: Be sensitive to Windows of receptivity.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 47

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 52

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 76

Outreach step five: Train senior adults to share their faith.

Outreach step six: Equip seniors to be effective disciple-makers.

Outreach step seven: Create a place of newcomers.

In principle, this strategy aims at making disciples of the elderly. Arn cautions, “If the senior adult ministry operates on outdated principles and inaccurate assumptions, it will evolve into a self-serving, inward-focused group of godly, but irrelevant, old people.”¹⁵⁷ No similar literature is found in Singapore, although there has been a distinct increase in Chinese elderly conversion to Christianity during the 1990s.¹⁵⁸

2.4.3 Religious change among the Singapore elderly

Sociologists point out that religion has a role in the adjustment to the physical, psychological, social, and existential aging process.¹⁵⁹ Research on the effects of religion among the elderly in Singapore found out that religion can endow elderly with “a sense of meaning, mastery, security, belongingness, identity, and continuity.”¹⁶⁰

From the statistics comparing data between the 1990 and 2000 Census (Table 2-7), the growth in Christianity is most obvious in the dialect speaking homes (1.7%), seventeen times higher than the Mandarin speaking homes (0.1%). Dialect speaking

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 143.

¹⁵⁸ According to the Singapore Census 1990 and 2000, there is an increase of 2.6 percent of elderly conversion from mainly Daoist to Christianity.

¹⁵⁹ Lavretsky, *Resilience and Aging: Research and Practice*, (John Hopkins University Press, 2014); Ralph W Hood, “Mystical, Spiritual and Religious Experiences,” in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, ed. Raymond F Paloutzian (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 348- 364; Harold G Koenig, *Aging and God: Spiritual Pathways to Mental Health in Midlife and Later Years* (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 1994).

¹⁶⁰ Xu Jianbin and Kalyani K Mehta, “The Effects of Religion on Subjective Aging in Singapore: An Interreligious Comparison,” *Journal of Aging Studies* 17, no. 4 (2003), 499.

homes mainly refer to those with elderly members. Tong accords this with the change of strategies in evangelizing to unreached dialect speaking Chinese Singaporeans.¹⁶¹

Language spoken/Year	1990	2000	Percentage change
English	39.2	39.8	0.6
Mandarin	8.2	8.3	0.1
Chinese dialect	8.2	9.9	1.7
Malay	0.7	0.7	0
Tamil	8.2	6.7	-1.5
Other language	11.1	11.1	0

Table 2-7 Christianity percentage change among resident population aged 15 years and older by language most frequently spoken at home (Source: Census of Population 2000)

Age Cohort/Year	1990	2000	Percentage change
15-24	13.2	12.8	-0.4
25-34	14.0	15.8	1.8
35-44	12.7	15.7	3.0
45-54	11.4	14.4	3.0
55 and above	11.1	13.7	2.6

Table 2-8 Christianity percentage change by age cohort (Source: Census of Population 2000)

The analysis provided by Tong seems to focus on the other age groups as the most visible growth among the cohorts comprising those between 35 and 54 years of age (3.0%). He points out that 68 percent of his interviewees became Christian because of the influence of friends,¹⁶² and more than 50 percent of the interviewees accepted Christ in school.¹⁶³ Intellectual conversion where the majority went through a process of reasoning is more prevalent than emotional conversion¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore Society*, 98.

¹⁶² Ibid., 100.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 101.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 104.

Eventually, they are attracted to Christianity for religious and non-religious benefits. In terms of religious benefits, Tong explains that Christianity meets their religious needs, especially in terms of finding meaning in life.¹⁶⁵ Also, the church provides them with a sense of belonging then enables them to build intimate relationships.¹⁶⁶ The non-religious benefits refer to the social services provided by the churches or Christian organizations.

Although there is an increase in the Christian population, Buddhism still sustains the most significant growth. (Table 2-9) Buddhism seems to attract Singaporeans from all age groups, with over a 10% change across the age spectrum, with the highest growth being among those aged 55 and above (15.4%). Also, there is a general decline in Daoism across all age groups, even among the 55 and above cohort (-1.5%).

In summary, the data suggest that the elderly in Singapore are still actively switching religion. Why do elderly change religions in their old age? What are the sociocultural barriers? What are their pathways? These are the questions this dissertation seeks to answer.

Religion/Year	1990	2000	Percentage Change
Christianity	11.1	13.7	2.6
Buddhism	32.0	47.4	15.4
Daoism	13.8	12.3	-1.5
Islam	13.8	12.3	-1.5
Hinduism	4.2	3.5	-0.7
Other Religions	0.6	0.7	0.1
No Religion	8.6	9.8	1.2

Table 2-9 Percentage change in religion among age cohort 55 and above (Source: Census of Population 2000)

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 119.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 120.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter attempts to understand the Chinese elderly through a review of literature on the aging theories, the social context of Singapore, and elderly religious change.

Aging Theories: The plethora of aging theories provides insights into the many possibilities of the aging process. Though aging might result in biological decline and thus disengagement with society, it also provides windows of opportunity for spiritual growth. Elderly can become more active in the searching of meaning and intimate relationships. In turn, they can transcend into a mature outlook of life with satisfaction. The Bible links aging with wisdom. When one walks in the path of God and obeys His precepts, one gains wisdom and thus no fear of aging. It shifts the focus of aging from the aging person to the wisdom of God. Thus the elderly can grow old in the hope and love of God and His community.

Singapore Context: Literature on Singapore revealed that this is an economically-driven nation. With survival and social threats at the outset of nation building, this multi-racial, multi-religious nation suppressed ethnical distinctions for economic growth and national solidarity. As such, competitiveness, meritocracy, and success have become the foundation of her national identity. In this social milieu, aging is a threatening process for the elderly whereby they become a burden on the economy. As Singapore aims to be a nation for all ages such that Singaporean can age successfully, government policies on aging have sought to ameliorate this process with support, with the family as the primary source of support, and the government as the secondary source. The CPF system and the housing policies were reviewed in the chapter.

Religious change: Recent research reveals that religious change is a prevalent phenomenon among older adults. As the younger generation is drawn to world religions by their rationality and the rationalizing process, the reasons for change among the elderly show otherwise. In the United States, it is due to the influence of family members. Relationship is the key factor in elderly conversion to another religion. No parallel literature is found on this subject on the Chinese elderly in Singapore. As more than 50 percent of elderly Singaporean Chinese are Daoist and Buddhist, what are the barriers they encountered when they follow Jesus?

In the next chapter, the methodology employed will be explained.

3 How to Listen to their Life Stories? -- Methodology and Procedure

3.1 Overview

The primary focus of this dissertation is the Chinese-speaking elderly population in Singapore. The intent is to understand the sociocultural barriers they faced in following Jesus. The method is to interview them and hear their life stories.

In total, twenty-four life story interviews and three focus groups were conducted in Mandarin and Teochew dialects. These were then transcribed, translated, and analyzed for themes and patterns.

The following sections detail the methodology of this research, the study population, sampling considerations, instruments used and the data gathering and analyzing process.

3.2 Methodology

This purpose of this research is to understand the sociocultural barriers encountered by Singapore Chinese-speaking elderly in following Jesus. The Life Story Interview Method is employed. Atkinson highlights that life story interviews focus on the “subjective essence of one person’s entire life.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, this method allows the barriers encountered to be understood in their own words. In regard to the sociocultural aspect of the barriers, life stories are cultural text; they reveal the norms, rules, and traditions of a society.¹⁶⁸ Also, life stories of the elderly contained much significant information about the life course, the sequence of generations, understanding of aging,

¹⁶⁷ Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 3.

¹⁶⁸ McAdams, “Personal Narratives and the Life Story,” 246.

and determining ways to improve the quality of life. This information has often been left out by “scientific knowledge-generating system.”¹⁶⁹ Telling their stories can help the elderly to reintegrate past experiences, and make sense of their lives as a whole, thus finding new meaning in the face of impending death.¹⁷⁰

As their sociocultural barriers are revealed and understood through life story interview methodology, Chinese-speaking elderly can be more holistically evangelized and disciplined and thus enjoy the abundance of life in Christ.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Before acquiring life story data, I submitted an overview of the research proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Asbury Theological Seminary. The proposal included the nature and purpose of the research, full description of the human participants, how the participants were selected, assessment of potential benefits and risks to the individual participant, data gathering procedure including the interview questions and letters to the church and informants. With the final approval of the IRB, the letters and the interview questions were then translated into Chinese.

Throughout the research, informants’ psychological and emotional aspects were treated with caution and care. As life story interviews involve the sharing of their personal life, I maintained their confidentiality. Audio recording and transcription were only for research purpose; only the researcher and the research committee were allowed to access. I also made interviewees aware that their participation was completely

¹⁶⁹ James E Birren, “Forward,” in *Aging and Biography: Explorations in Adult Development*, ed. Torbjorn Birren, James E, Kenyon, Gary M., Ruth, Jan-Erik, Schroots, Johannes J. F., and Svensson (New York: Springer, 1996), ix-xi.

¹⁷⁰ Robert. N. Bulter, “The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged,” *Psychiatry* 26 (1963): 65–76.

voluntarily and that they could discontinue participation at any time if the interview process became difficult for them. I verbally explained the purpose of research to reinforce what was written clearly in the invitation letter (shown in appendix 6). All the informants signed the consent form (shown in appendix 7).

In the presenting of the data, all names were fictitious to ensure anonymity. All transcriptions, along with the recordings, were stored for future research in a manner that maintained confidentiality and is only accessible to the researcher.

3.4 Research Population

This research seeks to understand, particularly, the sociocultural barriers of Chinese-speaking elderly when they followed Jesus, with the inclusion of how their barriers were overcome. Thus, the research population is delimited to Chinese-speaking elderly with two criteria: 1) they are Christians, and 2) they were baptized at age sixty and above.

3.4.1 Criterion 1: Christian

Non-Christian elderly were not included in this study because if elderly who are Daoists or Buddhists have never thought of following Jesus, the question of barrier will mostly be irrelevant and incongruent to them. Nevertheless, before I started my research, a trial interview was conducted with a non-Christian elderly individual; he is a good friend of this research project and is open to different religions. He shared his life story and his opinion about different religions. He also expressed his views about Christianity and some of the bad experiences with Christians. But the issue of sociocultural barriers did not really surface as he thinks he will not become a Christian. He feels content with his present worldview and belief system.

After the interview, I also realized that simply understanding the barriers but missing how they overcame the barriers made this research incomplete. This is like raising questions but without providing answers, although not all questions about life experiences fit uniformly with the answer. For example, elderly may reject Christianity due to their preconception that the Christian faith is a Western religion; but due to the positive witness of their children, they decide to follow Christ. This however does not mean that they have removed their preconceptions. Missiologically, understanding their barriers and identifying what influences them to Christianity provides a more holistic perspective for evangelism.

Pragmatically, in-depth life story interviews require availability and trust. Searching for suitable Chinese-speaking informants who are baptized after sixty years old is challenging, and building trust with the elderly requires time. Moreover, Chinese-speaking elderly tend to be more conservative in sharing their personal life. For this research, to include non-Christian elderly within this limited period of time was impractical.

3.4.2 Criterion 2: Baptized at Age Sixty or Older

Baptism was selected as a research criterion because it is almost impossible to identify their turning point towards Jesus. Missiologists and sociologists note that non-Christian Chinese in Singapore view baptism with much seriousness—they consider baptism as becoming the foster-children of the Christian God.¹⁷¹ Hence, for the purposes

¹⁷¹ Chee Kiong Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore Society*, (Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2007., 2007), 117; Batairwa Kubuya Paulin, "Conversion as Negotiation: Chinese Protestant Responses to Ancestor Related Practices.," *Asia Journal of Theology* 28, no. 1 (April 2014), 123.

of this dissertation, baptism is assumed an appropriate indicator for their entrance to the Christian religion.

It should be noted, however, in this research there were cases where baptism was conducted but the interviewee explicitly expressed that s/he was following their children or spouse to the Christian faith instead of following Jesus. For more than 90% of the informants, it was after a series of events that they finally understood the meaning of following Jesus. There are also cases where they wanted to become a Christian much earlier in their life but their baptism was withheld until they were over sixty.

Although these narratives challenge the understanding of baptism, they also raise important questions on how churches evangelize and disciple elderly. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this dissertation, baptism was considered an appropriate indicator for conversion.

As for the age of sixty and above, as this research focuses on Chinese-speaking elderly, the concept of “old” from a Chinese cultural perspective was used. According to the Chinese tradition, age sixty has a number of connotations. The ancient Chinese way of counting years employs a system of celestial Stems and terrestrial Branches (天干地支), also called the sexagenary cycle. There are ten stems and twelve branches.¹⁷² “Sixty” is the minimal common multiple of the ten stems and twelve branches. A span of sixty years represents a complete cycle of life.¹⁷³ As well, in the Chinese language, sixty years of age is called *jia zi* (甲子) or *hua jia* (花甲) which is used to describe elderly people,

¹⁷² Michael John Paton, *Five Classics of Fengshui : Chinese Spiritual Geography in Historical and Environmental Perspective*, Sinica Leidensia (Boston: Brill, 2013), 54.

¹⁷³ Qing Zou and Eun G Park, “Modelling Ancient Chinese Time Ontology,” *Journal of Information Science* 37, no. 3 (June 2011): 332.

and also symbolizes a new beginning in life. The Chinese ancient Book of Rite, *Li ji* (礼记), describes age sixty as elderly who have attained the seniority to instruct others (六十曰耆, 指使).¹⁷⁴ Confucius points out that the essence of one who reached sixty is docile (六十而耳顺).¹⁷⁵ He should be able to analyze what others say with kindness and accept things that are true. Hence, using Chinese cultural criteria, sixty years old is considered as elderly among Chinese and will be used as the a delimiter for this dissertation.

3.5 Sampling Procedure

In qualitative research, Michael Patton documents sixteen ways of sampling strategy, among which he comments that “convenience should be the last factor to be taken into account”¹⁷⁶ as the other fifteen strategies can yield crucial information about critical cases. He stresses that, “Convenience sampling is neither purposeful nor strategic.”¹⁷⁷ However, Wallace suggests that “Subjects of life story research admittedly are often chosen because of convenience or by chance.....Historically, the subjects of life story research have been obtained through chance encounters, word-or-mouth referral, and the solicitation of volunteers.”¹⁷⁸

I followed both of these seemingly contrastive views in my research. My sampling process first began by convenience and then with purposeful strategies in search of diversity. Being purposeful in diversity allowed informants with different

¹⁷⁴ James. Legge, *The Sacred Books of China : The Texts of Confucianism 3* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), 66.

¹⁷⁵ Confucius, *The analects of Confucius*: William Edward Soothill (Yokohama, 1910), 151.

¹⁷⁶ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods / Michael Quinn Patton*. (Newbury Park, Calif. : Sage Publications, c1990., 1990).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 181

¹⁷⁸ J.B. Wallace, “Life Stories,” in *Qualitative Methods in Aging Research*, ed. Andrea Gubrium, Jaber F and Sankar (Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc, 1994), 141-2.

backgrounds to have stories told but also provided a more complete picture of the elderly following Jesus in different contexts.¹⁷⁹

In terms of sample size, Patton states that there are no rules in qualitative inquiry as it depends on the goal and purpose, the available time, and resource of the research.¹⁸⁰ Sharing the same view with Patton, Wallace elaborates, “sampling and data collection continue until an empirically grounded theoretical understanding of the subject matter has been formed.”¹⁸¹ Therefore when the analysis of new cases adds little insights, or “to a point of redundancy”¹⁸² and saturation, further sampling is unnecessary.¹⁸³

For example, psychologist Piaget only observed his own two children at length and depth to make a major breakthrough in understanding how children think. Freud based his research on fewer than ten informants to establish the field of psychoanalysis.¹⁸⁴ In gerontology research with life stories, between the 1990s to early 2000s, Luborsky used 16 informants,¹⁸⁵ Heliker used 5 informants,¹⁸⁶ and Chua, 12.¹⁸⁷ In more recent research, Mazur and Kay both used 5 informants.¹⁸⁸

¹⁷⁹ Jaber F Gubrium and Andrea Sankar, *Qualitative Methods in Aging Research*, ed. Jaber F Gubrium and Andrea Sankar, Sage focus edition, Vol. 168 (Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc, 1994), 144

¹⁸⁰ Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 184.

¹⁸¹ Wallace, “Life Stories,” 143.

¹⁸² Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 186.

¹⁸³ Wallace, “Life Stories,” 143.

¹⁸⁴ Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 185.

¹⁸⁵ Mark R Luborsky, “The Romance with Personal Meaning in Gerontology: Cultural Aspects of Life Themes,” *Gerontologist* 33, no. 4 (1993), 445-452.

¹⁸⁶ Diane Maria Heliker, “Personal Meaning in the Elderly: A Heideggerian Hermeneutical Phenomenological Study,” ed. Donna Rankin, *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (United States -- Illinois: Loyola University of Chicago, 1995).

¹⁸⁷ Lily K Chua, “Christian Spirituality in the Life Stories of Chinese-American Older Adults,” (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001).

¹⁸⁸ Thais Mazur, “The Effect of Mindfulness Practice on the Perception of Senior Meditators’ Life Stories When Faced with a Major Life Transition,” (Ann Arbor: Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center, 2013); Jonathan E Kay, “Material Life Review: Folk Art and Aging in Indiana,” (Ann Arbor: Indiana University, 2014).

Informed by the above literature, as the sampling size is undetermined, by convenience, I sought help from my ex-colleague who is the senior ministry worker of my home church in Singapore. She first sorted out 25 elderly who were baptized after 60. She verbally obtained their consent and then provided me with their particulars. Prior to this stage, I obtained the permission from my senior pastor for this research. I categorized this information in terms of gender, place of birth, age, date of baptism, education level, dialect group, previous occupations and religion. With further understanding of their narrative ability and availability,¹⁸⁹ the list was reduced to 13. With regards to convenience and trust, I first interviewed those whom I have pastored and had known before personally.

Among the 13 informants, most were without, or have less than two years of, education. As education is a key factor in reflecting their social status, in search of diversity, I purposefully sought recommendations from other churches of different denominations with members having higher educational levels. Interviews proceeded, and saturation occurred at the 20th interview. However, I continued with another four interviews: two of them were an elderly couple, the husband was 87 years old, oldest among all informants. A third was the youngest informant, 62 and who was baptized only a year ago. He also attained the highest education among the male informants. The fourth additional informant was an example of delayed baptism; she claimed to be a Christian when she was 18 and her baptism was delayed till she was 71.

¹⁸⁹ Wallace, "Life Stories," 142.

3.6 Instruments

The instruments used include the researcher, field notes and journal, interview questions, focus groups and audio recording.

3.6.1 Researcher

Heliker writes, "In interpretive research, the researcher him/herself becomes an instrument."¹⁹⁰ Connelly & Clandinin emphasize that the role of the researcher in narrative inquiry is to facilitate as a collaborator between him/herself and the subjects through a social interaction over time.¹⁹¹ In the same vein, Rubin and Rubin state that the researcher's philosophy impacts how one collects the data.¹⁹² The researcher's value, background, and present knowledge in the field can influence the researcher's point of view. However, so long as the researcher makes explicit their contexts so as to maintain a sense of awareness of the latter possible influence upon the research.

Informed by the above literature, I am well aware about my subjectivity in this research. As narrated in the first chapter, it was the stories of my mother and grandmother that drove me to find out the barriers encountered by the Chinese-speaking elderly when they wanted to follow Jesus. My passion for the elderly grew as I served in a traditional Chinese Church for six years (2003-2009).

During my pastorate, I had many opportunities to be with the elderly. For the first one and a half years, I was the minister taking care of the Teochew-speaking

¹⁹⁰ Heliker, "Personal Meaning in the Elderly: A Heideggerian Hermeneutical Phenomenological Study," 75.

¹⁹¹ F Michael Connelly and D Jean Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," *Educational Researcher* VO - 19, no. 5 (1990): 2.

¹⁹² Herbert J Rubin, Irene. Rubin, and SAGE., *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks [etc.]: Sage Publications, 2005).

congregation, of which 70 percent were elderly above 60. The next four and a half years, I served as the minister for Christian Education. In this position, I oversaw the Sunday school program of the whole church and had the opportunity to witness how some elderly were transformed in God's Word. However, the majority was stagnant in their faith -- they did/could not see the need for continual growth in Christ. Consequently, their faith became superficial, and following Jesus was reduced to religious practice only on Sunday. This compelled me to revise the Sunday school program so that the Word speaks to them more relevantly. However, I still felt deficient in understanding or their live situations even though I made effort to connect with them in my weekly visitations.

Thereafter, I was called to the United States to be equipped. For the past five years (2010-2015) while I was studying, I served as a volunteer pastor in the local Chinese church in Lexington, Kentucky. I preached once a month and assisted in two senior adult cell groups. In this sociocultural context where most of the elderly are from China, these elderly caused me to ponder deeper into the barriers they encountered in following Jesus.

Being a pastor has its strengths and weaknesses in the interviewing process. In terms of strength, first, trust is easier to establish. Trust enables the elderly to share more freely their stories. Secondly, it was much easier to identify the informants. My ex-colleague who helped me to shortlist the first round of elderly told me that gathering consent from these elderly for me was not a problem at all. She could easily solicit 25 informants. As for informants who are not from my former church, although locating suitable informants was not as easy, being a pastor still has the advantage to establish trust in a shorter time.

The major weakness of being a pastor-researcher is the inclination to be too pastoral. In the process of the interviews, informants who are still entrenched in their dilemmas would seek pastoral advice. In such situations, I had to restrain myself; otherwise, the interview session soon would turn out to be a pastoral counselling session, potentially affecting how they tell their story.

3.6.2 Interviewing questions

Life story research is a narrative account produced by the informant; therefore, life story interviews are usually unstructured.¹⁹³ However, Chinese-speaking elderly are more conservative *per se*, hence, unstructured interviews do not work well, especially with male informants who were more introvert-inclined. Also, in order to elicit the specific information for this research, questions on the following two aspects were raised:

1) Life context before their baptism: These questions were geared to understand their perspective about their different live situations which include their childhood, family, marriage, work, life and death. (As shown in Appendix 1) Through their narration, their sociocultural context was revealed, and their barriers to follow Jesus became explicit.

2) The moment or period when they made the turn to follow Jesus: the questions focus more on who influenced them and how the decision was initiated and what happened after the decision was made. (As shown in Appendix 2)

The questions were asked not in sequence. On some occasions, while I was clarifying and enquiring about their demographic data, they began to narrate their stories.

¹⁹³ Wallace, "Life Stories," 144.

3.7 Data Gathering Procedure

3.7.1 Interview

With humility and respectfulness, I endeavored to build rapport with the informants from the outset, and construct an interactive, relaxed and friendly atmosphere for the interviews. I collected the demographic data first, and followed spontaneously with the prepared questions. Interviews were conducted in the informants' homes or at their place of worship for these are familiar physical environments that facilitate the unfolding of their lived experiences. Each informant was interviewed for a minimum of one to two 1.5-hour sessions, depending on their stamina, availability and narrative ability. Most sessions exceeded two hours.

For couples, I conducted three sessions. The first session I interviewed them together, then for the next two sessions, I interviewed them separately. Two couples preferred to be interviewed together, but I still conducted the third session as they had more to say as a couple.

3.7.2 Focus Group Interview

Focus groups are semi-structured discussions with groups of 4–12 people that aim to explore a specific set of issues.¹⁹⁴ The purpose of the focus group was to discover barriers through group dynamics.¹⁹⁵ The number of questions that can be asked in a focus group is limited as the amount of response time is increased considerably by having a number of people responding to the same question. Therefore, questions asked were

¹⁹⁴ Allison Tong, Peter Sainsbury, and Jonathan Craig, "Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ): A 32-Item Checklist for Interviews and Focus Groups.," *International Journal For Quality In Health Care: Journal Of The International Society For Quality In Health Care / Isqua* 19, no. 6 (December 2007): 349–357.

¹⁹⁵ Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 336.

more focused on their barriers. This provided me with another opportunity to look for additional content that they did not flesh out in the one-to-one interviews and also the barriers they repeatedly emphasized.

Three focus groups were conducted: one male group, one female group, and one special group. The male group had five participants and the female group, four. Participants were selected from the 24 informants and matched according to their availability. Due to the constraint of time, I did not conduct a mixed group. For the special focus group, I deliberately involved elderly at their different stages of faith. For example, one of them has been baptized more than ten years, and another just a few months. I also invited two elderly Bible teachers who are involved and experienced in leading the Chinese elderly to Christ for more than ten years. From both *emic* and *etic* perspectives, they shared the barriers they themselves and other Chinese elderly encountered. This allowed cross-examination of different experiences and triggered more responses. Each group was interviewed between one-half to two hours.

I asked four questions:

- 1 Why were you baptized after 60 years old?
- 2 What stopped you from following Jesus in your earlier days?
- 3 When you followed Jesus, what changed?
- 4 What are the challenges you encountered as you follow Jesus?

3.7.3 Audio Recording, Field Notes and Journals

All interviews were audio recorded. Wallace points out that because life story data come primarily from participants' spoken words, they are typically audio recorded to

ensure accuracy and speed.¹⁹⁶ I audio recorded all the interviews. Per IRB guidelines, all informants signed the informed consent for the interview and agreed to be audio recorded.

I did consider video recording and conducted a trial interview with a Chinese elderly. But the camera in front of her became a distraction as she was too sensitive and cautious of how she looked, thus affecting the interview. As such, I dropped the idea of video recording.

In addition, field notes and a journal were used. As verbatim texts leave out large amount of non-verbal information, field notes were written after each interview to account for this limitation.

I also used a journal to track emotions and non-verbal expression during the interviews. After the interviews, I included my thoughts and feelings about the informants in my journal, including personal spiritual issues that arose and reflections on how the life stories itself affected my perspective towards sharing the gospel with the Chinese-speaking elderly.¹⁹⁷

3.8 Data Analysis Procedure

In the analysis of life stories, Atkinson highlights that it is a highly subjective process, as experience and interpretation are both very relative.¹⁹⁸ An individual's life story is to be considered trustworthy rather than truthful as subjective reality is sought. Atkinson also argues that "reliability and validity are not necessarily the appropriate

¹⁹⁶ Wallace, "Life Stories," 146.

¹⁹⁷ Janet L Ramsey Blieszner, Rosemary., *Spiritual Resiliency in Older Women: Models of Strength for Challenges through the Life Span*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), 42.

¹⁹⁸ Atkinson , *The Life Story Interview*, 60.

valuative standards for a life story interview,”¹⁹⁹ as there are multiple possible perspectives in a story. He proposes to look for internal consistencies of the story, collaboration between the informants and the researcher, and the persuasion of the story.

In terms of theoretical interpretation, Atkinson suggests that the best theory is the one that expands and deepens the understanding of the story through the data. However, it is best to suspend theoretical assumptions until after the interview in order to see what theories emerge from the story. Analyzing life story analysis requires a perspective broader than the analyst in order to fully understand the story. I employed Atkinson’s qualitative analytic procedures in the following manner:

- (a) Construct a taxonomy of barriers and pathways
- (b) Identify the type of life each life story depicts
- (c) Seek consistencies across life stories in any of these areas ²⁰⁰

After each interview, I thought through these questions in order to avoid being judgmental: “What meaning does this life story bring to my life? What does it add to other lives? Is there a central theme or pattern to the story?”²⁰¹ Next, I made connection with the purpose of my research -- to discover the barriers of Chinese-speaking elderly when they follow Jesus. After each transcription, I also asked, “What does this story tell me about her/his barriers to follow Jesus?” I tabulated a taxonomy of the barriers and pathways that are reflected in these stories.

I re-read each story again, and looked for sentences and contents that were often repeated. As the interview was semi-structured, I re-assembled the stories into four

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 59.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 68.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 70.

sections: childhood, marriage and work, pathways to Jesus, Christianity and other religions, so as to observe the internal consistencies of the story, also, to better focus on the different stages and transitions of their lives.

I coded and highlighted the barriers that were common to all the informants despite of their different backgrounds. Themes emerged and patterns were formed.

3.9 Chapter Summary

One of the best ways to understand the elderly is to listen to their stories in person. Life story interview allows the elderly to tell their stories in the way they would like. The process of listening, recording, transcribing, and analyzing enriches the researcher. In turn, the researcher, as an instrument, projects the stories of the elderly as close to reality as possible.

In the next two chapters, the life stories will be analyzed with emphases on the barriers and pathway by way of a taxonomy. Emerging themes will be presented.

4 What are these Life Stories saying? -- Data Analysis

The purpose of this research is to understand the sociocultural barriers encountered by Singapore Chinese-speaking elderly when they follow Jesus. Twenty-four life stories were collected of elderly who were baptized after the age of sixty. Categories of barrier were elicited from these stories through the narration of their childhood, family, work, marriage, and how they were introduced to Jesus. There were many similarities among these elderly despite their varied social backgrounds. By identifying the connections, meanings, and patterns that exist in the story itself,²⁰² five categories were tabulated. In this chapter, I first present the informants' demographics and then discuss the categories from these life stories.

4.1 Informants' Demographics

All the informants have been living in Singapore for at least forty years. Among them, sixteen were born in Singapore, three emigrated from China, four are from Malaysia, and one is from Indonesia. Informants were born between 1927 and 1952, the ages ranging from 61 and 87 at the time of the interview, all collected between February and June 2014. Most of the interviewees experienced the impact of Second War World in different locations of Asia. They also participated and witnessed the building of Singapore from a rural village into a world class city.

Table 4-1 presents the gender and age distribution as well as other demographic characteristics of the informants:

²⁰² Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 64.

Table 4-1 Demographic of Informants

	N= 24	Percent
Gender		
Male (M)	10	42
Female (F)	14	58
Place of Birth		
Singapore	15 (6M, 9F)	62.5
Malaysia	4 (3M, 1F)	17
China	4 (1M, 3F)	17
Indonesia	1 (0M, 1F)	4
Age		
60-69	6 (3M, 3F)	25
70-79	14 (4M, 10F)	58
80+	4 (3M, 1F)	17
Baptism Age		
60-69	14 (4M, 10F)	58
70-79	8 (5M, 3F)	33
80+	2 (1M, 1F)	9
Marital Status		
Married	18 (9M, 9F) (Number of couples: 4)	75
Widow	5	21
Widower	1	4
Previous religion		
Buddhism	1 (M)	4
Ancestor worship	3 (1M, 1F)	13
Daoism	11 (3M, 8F)	46
Daoism/Ancestor worship	6 (5M, 2F)	29
Daoism/Buddhism	1 (F)	4
Free thinker/Atheist	2 (F)	8
Education level		
None	4 (1M, 3F)	17
Primary	9 (5M, 4F)	37
Secondary	7 (4M, 3F)	29
Pre-U	3 (F)	13
University	1 (F)	4

Dialect Group		
Teochew	15 (6M, 9F)	63
Hokkein	4 (1M, 3F)	17
Hakka	3 (2M, 1F)	13
Shandong	1 (F)	4
Hock Chew	1 (M)	4
Living Arrangement		
With spouse or others	23 (10M 13F)	96
Living alone	1 (F)	4
Denomination		
Presbyterian	18 (7M, 11F)	75
Free Evangelical	3 (1M, 2F)	13
Methodist	1 (F)	4
AOG	1 (M)	4
Independent	1 (M)	4

Baptism age ranged from 62 to 80. Fifty-eight percent of the informants fall in the range of age 60 to 69. At the point of interview, some were baptized only less than a year and some more than ten years ago. There are two informants who expressed that they have been following Jesus when they were young but baptism was delayed due to family responsibilities. This affected how the elderly described their barriers to follow Jesus before and after baptism. Narrations of how they overcame their barriers were not as vivid when compared to those who were recently baptized.

None of elderly are single, but five are widows and one is a widower. Among the eighteen married informants, there are four couples. For the ten married informants, four of their spouses are non-Christians, three baptized before 60. The other three, though baptized after 60 years of age, refused to be interviewed or due to lack of availability.

In terms of previous religion before conversion, more than 50% of the informants were Daoist. Only one informant clearly stated that he was a Buddhist. Some of the informants claimed to be Buddhist but when I enquired which gods they prayed to, they named the statues such as *Da bo gong* (大伯公 Big Uncle God) and *Guan Yin* (观音 The Goddess of Mercy). Thus I categorized them as Daoist or Daoist with ancestor worship if they prayed to their ancestor. The only female informant who practiced Buddhist meditation also prayed to the *Da Bo Gong*. Hence, the category of Daoist/Buddhism was created. Two claimed to be free-thinker/atheist, and one of them prayed to statues of different gods due to familial responsibility.

During the Crown colonial period (1867-1942) in Singapore, education of the Chinese community was much neglected by the British administration; this was partly due to the British intent in Singapore for trade and not settlement.²⁰³ Moore writes in *The First 150 years of Singapore* that the British administration saw “little point in spending money on education for the children of immigrants, particularly for the children of a people so strange and, by definition, so benighted as the Chinese.”²⁰⁴

It was common that most Chinese rarely had a chance for education during that period. The earliest Chinese schools in Singapore were established by Chinese philanthropists, Clan association and Christian mission.²⁰⁵ Seventy-five percent of the informants were 70 years old, born in 1944 and before, most of them have no opportunity for education. As mentioned previously, I deliberately searched for those with higher

²⁰³ Yeow Tong Chia, “The Loss of the ‘ World-Soul ’? Education, Culture and the Making of the Singapore Developmental State , 1955 – 2004,” 2011, 59.

²⁰⁴ Moore and Moore, *The First 150 Years of Singapore*, 498.

²⁰⁵ Chia, “The Loss of the ‘ World-Soul ’? Education, Culture and the Making of the Singapore Developmental State , 1955 – 2004,” 30; Saravanan Gopinathan, *Towards a National System of Education in Singapore, 1945-1973*, (Oxford University Press, Ely House, London W. 1, Singapore, 1974), 3.

education for the purpose of diversity and also to understand the sociocultural barriers for those have more education. It is interesting to note that although males are usually more valued in Chinese patriarchal society, they usually have more opportunities for education. In the research, the female informants attained a higher level of education than the males.

Teochew-speaking elderly constituted sixty-three percent of the informants. This is due to the limitation of the researcher who can only speak the Teochew dialect better. Also, a majority of the informants were identified from his Teochew church. Mandarin was used in the interview with the other nine informants and some of the Teochew informants who preferred to speak Mandarin.

In terms of residence arrangement, only one informant lives by herself. The rest of the informants either live with their spouse, children or tenants.

Although the denomination the informants belong to should not affect their life story before baptism, I have included this category for the purposes of reference and acknowledgement. As well, the focus of this research is on the elderly, not an evaluation and study of how churches evangelize the elderly. However, improved understanding of the elderly by churches as a result of this research should enable them to more appropriately and effectively reach out to the elderly.

4.2 Barriers and Pathways

After transcribing, translating and analyzing of the 24 life-stories and the three focus group interviews, the barriers encountered by these elderly became evident. A taxonomy of their barriers, including their pathways, is tabulated as follows:

Table 4-2 Taxonomy: Barriers and Pathways of Chinese-speaking Elderly following Jesus

	Recurrences
Barriers	
Tradition/Religion	19
Follow parents to pray to <i>Da bo gong</i> (Big Uncle God)/ <i>Guan Yin</i> (Goddess of Mercy) <i>etc</i>	
Shaman practice	
God-son of Goddess of Mercy	
Committed to Buddhist chanting	
Husband is a staunch Daoist	
Chairman of a Daoist temple	
Christian Witness	10
No one share the gospel with me	
Only one Christian family in the village	
No Christian friends	
Bad impression about Christian	
Christianity is too radical	
Christians are ridiculous and unreasonable	
Work	19
Too tough, too busy no time for religion	
Enjoy working	
Focused on work, and forgot about worries	
Feel proud with his work	
Find identity in working	
Find meaning in working	
Family	14
Too busy with housework and children, no time for religion	
Responsible for non-believing parents and relatives	
Responsible for ancestor altar and worship	
Wife's animosity towards Christianity	
Father's objection of baptism	
Mother-in-law objection of baptism	
Family's bitterness and complication	
Social Status	7
Can manage life well	
Don't see the need for religion	
Good marriage, good family support	

Pathways

Retirement	15
Boredom	
Loneliness	
Crisis	11
Deceased of spouse	
Deceased of friends	
Diagnosed with cancer	
Depression, stroke	
Family and Christian witness	20
Children	(13)
Wife	(2)
Relatives/Friends	(5)
Others	8
Disappointed with Chinese astrology	
Corruption in the Daoist temple	
Touched by the Spirit	
Experienced miracles	
Simplicity in Christian worship as compared to Daoism	
Fortune-teller predicted her death	

The number of recurrences in each theme is enumerated from the demographic data, coded and cross-examined with the transcriptions of the life stories and the focus group interviews. Every informant encountered more than one barrier and some of the barriers were inter-related.

4.2.1 Tradition/Religion

In the category of “Tradition/Religion,” the line between tradition and religion was vague. There were three cases where the informants told me during the demographic enquiry that their previous religion was Buddhism; but when I asked if they have any statues installed in their home, they listed *Da Bo Gong*, *Guan Yin*, Happy Buddha and so

forth. In more than 90 percent of the informants, they revealed that even though they have statues in their homes, they were just adhering to their family tradition.

Religion to the Chinese in Singapore might just be an expression of respect to the Chinese tradition. But what does the term “religion” mean to the Chinese? Highly acclaimed by western scholars,²⁰⁶ C. K. Yang’s work, “Religion in Chinese Society,” first published in 1961, defines religion as such:

In a broad sense, religion may be viewed as a continuum ranging from *nontheistic belief systems* with an emotional intensity that borders upon ultimacy, to *theistic belief systems* with ultimate values fully symbolized in supernatural entities and supported by patterns of worship and organization.²⁰⁷ (*Italics mine*)

In this definition, religion in the Chinese society includes one without a transcendent god. Yang further elaborates that the religion of a nontheistic belief system is like Communism which bears “the qualities of a religion and may perform some of the basic psychosocial functions of full-fledged theistic religions.”²⁰⁸ If Yang is right in this definition, the practice of Daoism and Buddhism in Singapore is more of tradition rather than religion.

If God is absent from a religion, is such a religion still called religion? From a Western philosophical perspective, religion involves a divine being and the explanation of the after-life.²⁰⁹ In psychological terms, religion is seen as a force that reconnects

²⁰⁶ Maurice. Freedman, “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Emily. Martin (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974), 36.

²⁰⁷ C K Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 26.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

human disjointedness and restrains errant impulses.²¹⁰ However, from an Eastern viewpoint, some scholars see religion in the light of Yang's definition.

Buddhism and Daoism should not be regarded as religion; rather, Buddhism and Daoism are vehicles for moral education. Philosopher Liang Shuming observed that the religiousness of the Chinese is the weakest in the world. Even when there is an inclination for the need of religion, it is out of a "motivation of lower degree."²¹¹ This implies that Chinese's religiousness is grown out of physical needs. Unadulterated intention to seek for God is rare in the culture. Consequently, God is absent in many literary works on Chinese thoughts and philosophy.

Chinese philosopher, Qian Mu, states that although Buddhism may be called a religion, "its object of faith is an internal Buddha or Bodhisattva, rather than an external God. On this point, Buddhism is consistent with the Chinese spirit of admiring sages. Therefore, Buddhist belief seems to begin and end with human beings. We might say that Buddhism is a religion based in humanity."²¹² This resonates with Yang's nontheistic belief system.

With regard to religious practice, Fudan University sociologist Fan Lizhu explicates that "Chinese religious beliefs were expressed in practical, daily life such as Chinese tradition medicine, the Chinese surname system, ancestral veneration rituals, augury, geomancy, and other local rituals, all of which reflect the nature of Chinese

²¹⁰ David G Benner and Peter C Hill, *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999).

²¹¹ Liang shu ming, *Dong xi wen hua ji qi zhe xue* (Bei jing: Shang wu yin shu guan, 2010), 218.

²¹² Fan Lizhi, "The Dilemma of Pursuing Chinese Religious Studies within the Framework of Western Religious Theories," in *Social Scientific Studies of Religion in China: Methodology, Theories, and Findings, Religion in Chinese Societies*, ed. Fenggang Lang, Graeme and Yang (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 93.

religion as diffused throughout the culture and dedicated to the concerns of daily life.”²¹³

This brings us back to the concept of a “diffused” religion which was first offered by Yang in 1961.²¹⁴

Apparently, the Chinese concept of religion is starkly different from the West. But the practice of Chinese religion that diffused into every aspect of life challenges the elderly who followed Jesus. How then could this following be “diffused” into every aspect of their lives?

Eugene Peterson articulates,

Following Jesus necessarily means getting his ways and means into our everyday lives. It is not enough simply to recognize and approve his ways and get started in the right direction. Jesus' ways are meant to be embraced by our imaginations and assimilated into our habits. This takes place only as we pray our following of him. It cannot be imposed from without, cannot be copied. It must be shaped from within.²¹⁵

How do Chinese elderly in Singapore follow Jesus? What does religion mean to them? They might not be able to succinctly define or express it, but religion can be understood through their life stories. I have listed the different facets of traditional and religious practice in this category that derived from the data which will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

4.2.2 The Christian Witness

With regard to the data on “Christian Witness,” although the number of recurrences is only ten, I coded according to what informants expressed explicitly in the

²¹³ Ibid., 96.

²¹⁴ Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*.

²¹⁵ Eugene H Peterson, *The Jesus Way : A Conversation on the Ways That Jesus Is the Way* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007), 216-7.

transcriptions, such as “no Christian shared the gospel with me,” “there is only one Christian family in our village,” “Christians are ridiculous,” and the like. I did not include those who did not mention any account about Christianity while they were telling their story.

In fact, the lack of a Christian witness was a social reality at that time. The Christian population in Singapore was scarce. According to the 1931 Census, Christians only constituted 5.3% of the population.²¹⁶ There were no official religious affiliation statistics between 1930 and 1980.²¹⁷ According to the work by Keith Hinton, *Growing Churches Singapore Style*, the Chinese Christian population was much lower. From the founding of Singapore by Stamford Raffles in 1819 up until 1930, for more than a century, the growth of Christianity was very slow. Although Raffles’ attitude toward Christianity and missionaries was positive, most Christian missionaries from the West were targeting China, not Singapore. Singapore was merely used as a stepping stone to China. Most Christian resources in Singapore were spent on the small community of expatriates; hence, Christianity did not penetrate the local Chinese population. Hinton states that,

After 100 years only a fraction of one per cent of the population was Christian. There were a few noble souls who had a burden for the Chinese and Malays and the long term results of their work rather meagre considering the effort expended.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore Society*, 57.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 58

²¹⁸ Keith W Hinton, *Growing Churches Singapore Style: Ministry in an Urban Context* (Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1985), 16.

Also, the growth of Christian population in Singapore was impeded by the multiplicity of languages spoken. There were five major Chinese dialects plus English, Malay, and several others Indian languages.²¹⁹ Moreover, Chinese immigrants in this period did not come to Singapore for permanent settlement. They came to the south out of poverty in search of wealth. Hence, they were not prepared to make permanent and major religious changes.²²⁰

From the standpoint of the missionaries, Singapore was not their targeted mission field. As for the Chinese immigrants, they viewed their stay in Singapore as temporal. Consequently, the population of Christian was low and thus the lack of a Christian witnesses.

4.2.3 Work, Family, and Social status

In the next three categories -- “Work,” “Family,” and “Social status,” all three are inter-related. The purpose of work for all the informants was to raise the family and in turn, the family gave them motivation and meaning to sustain their work. Their social status depends on their family background, education and occupation. The category of “Work” has the highest count of 19. Pervasively, life was challenging during the social context before and after the Second World War, especially with the Chinese-speaking community. The first prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, recalled in his *Memoirs*,

The Chinese educated had no place or role to play in the official life of the colony, which employed only English-educated as subordinates. The government

²¹⁹ Ibid., 19

²²⁰ Ibid., 17

provided primary schools teaching in English and in Malay and secondary schools teaching only in English.²²¹

If educated Chinese had no place or role in official life of the colony, those with little or no education, (54% of my informants) had to work doubly hard. Up until 1947, more than half of the population lived in cubicles with no water or sanitation, and in 1957, a study revealed that the 4 square miles of the inner city housed 130,000 per square mile in single to three-story terraced houses.²²² Poverty was massive and work dominated their lives, thus crippling them from any other involvement that did not provide immediate material benefits. Hence, attending church and following Jesus was never given a thought by these Chinese.

For working women, it was far worst. Not only did they have to take any available job, some even had to take on another extra job in order to have enough to feed the family. More than ten out of the fourteen female informants reflected that besides work, they also had to cook and wash for the entire family, take care of the children, and even attend to the ancestor altars. Additionally, they were often entangled in complicated familial relationships. The bitterness of work and family, and the busyness of everyday life entrenched them in a world of hatred and sorrow.

On the brighter side, some of the female informants were well supported and loved by the family. They were given the opportunity for education, and they could manage their lives well. Ironically, they did not feel the need for religion, not to mention Christianity. In turn, a good life became a barrier to follow Jesus.

²²¹ Kuan Yew Lee, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, 167.

²²² Hinton, *Growing Churches Singapore Style: Ministry in an Urban Context*, 18

Reflected in the stories, another factor that obstructed them from following Jesus was their personalities. Some described themselves as introvert, too rebellious, or too argumentative. What kind of personalities is more open to Christianity? Life stories revealed the traits and characters of the informants.²²³ However, this required detailed examination of different personalities through a psychological perspective that exceeded my area of focus.

4.3 Pathways

This section describes how Chinese-speaking elderly overcome enormous barriers to conversion. Several recurring themes emerge.

4.3.1 Retirement & Crisis

Retirement is a key factor in freeing the elderly from the busyness of work; only after their retirement did they find time for other activities. Chinese often say that they have to wait until their retirement before they have time to think of religious matters.

However, retirement does not automatically bring them to follow Jesus. Although one of my criteria for identifying informants is that they be baptized after age 60, it might be too obvious that one of the pathways to conversion was their retirement. However, more than half of the informants, after their retirement, are still drawn away by many other distractions. These include taking care of their grandchildren, personal hobbies, touring around the world, or other family commitments.

²²³ Dan P McAdams, "The Psychology of Life Stories.," *Review of General Psychology* 5, no. 2, Autobiographical Memory (June 2001): 100–122, 10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.100; McAdams, "Personal Narratives and the Life Story," 242-262.

Almost 50 percent of the informants encountered life crises that engaged them to think about religious matters seriously. However, without a Christian witness and several other important factors listed in the taxonomy, life crises may also lead them to deeper isolation in their old age.

4.3.2 Family & Christian Witness

As well, out of the 24 informants, eighteen explicitly expressed that they are old, and they wanted to believe in the same religion as their children, spouse or siblings. In most of these cases, children who exhibited filial piety won their parents' heart. Family members and friends who truthfully care for the elderly cleared the barriers for them to follow Jesus.

It is ironic to note that while family was once their barrier as they worked their whole life for the family, when they were old in age, family becomes their pathways to follow Jesus. Family matters may seem trivial, but it is in these trivialities that draw people away from Jesus, and also bring people to Jesus.

These informants unanimously voiced, in different expressions, that family is their top priority in life: they live for the family, work for the family, and they follow the family's religion and tradition. Men work all their lives for the family, and when a woman marries a man, she marries into the entire family. She becomes the cook, the washer, the housekeeper, and in many cases, the daughter-in-law who drowns in endless housework yet is entangled in unresolved in-law's relational complications. However, family members also serve as the major pathway (20 recurrences) that brings them into the abundance of Christ.

4.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the barriers that prevented the Chinese-speaking elderly from following Jesus are presented. From the analysis of the 24 life stories, five categories of barriers were tabulated as in Table 4-2. As well, the pathways to Jesus are revealed. All the 24 life stories are situated in the Chinese traditional and religious context where there is a serious lack of Christian witness. Thus family background, work and social status become distinctive barriers.

In the next chapter, the life stories will be presented in order to understand their barriers encountered in their particular background and context.

5 Listening to their Stories

The purpose of this chapter is to understand, in their own words, the barriers encountered by the Chinese-speaking elderly when they follow Jesus. Life stories are invaluable resources as they reveal the sociocultural context and thus make the barriers encountered explicit. McAdams point out that life stories are cultural text; they mirror the culture wherein the stories are created and told.²²⁴ Moreover, Chinese elderly placed a greater emphasis on social interaction and significance in their stories.²²⁵ Hence, life stories are more than “data” for analyses of sociocultural context and barriers.²²⁶

Understanding the sociocultural context is also vital for the purpose of evangelism. Vincent Donovan defines evangelization as “the process of bringing the gospel to people where they are, not where you would like them to be.”²²⁷ Hence, without understanding the social and cultural context, evangelization is not possible.

During the 1990s, social and cultural changes were the most crucial factors for the increase in the Chinese Christian population in the United States. Chinese sociologist Fenggang Yang explains that as a consequence of civil wars, political storms, and social turmoil, Chinese cultural traditions were seriously interrupted or lost between the 1950s to the 1980s in China. When Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States, they are both free - and bound - to seek alternate meaning systems. In such a social and cultural context, with the presence of a Christian witness, Chinese immigrants responded to

²²⁴ Ibid., 246-7.

²²⁵ Ibid., 247.

²²⁶ Arthur Frank, “The Standpoint of Storyteller,” *Qualitative Health Research* 10, no. 3, Advances in methods (May 2000): 355.

²²⁷ Vincent J Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982), xii.

Christianity in large numbers. Yang emphasizes that social and cultural changes in the process of coerced modernization constitute the most important factors for large numbers of Chinese conversions in the United States.²²⁸

Contrary to the case in the United States, the social and cultural context in Singapore is an impediment rather than a catalyst for Chinese elderly to follow Jesus. As analyzed in chapter 4, this is due to the lack of a Christian witness and the presence of deep roots in the Chinese tradition and belief system. These elderly also have experienced the rapid social and cultural changes of the modernization process in Singapore. However, the search for meaning in life and the understanding of self-identity were never their priority as there was no need and little time to think about such abstract questions. They were overwhelmed by the daily cares and concerns of how to provide enough bread and butter for the family. In such a social and cultural context, Chinese elderly were often entrenched in their work and family.

As mentioned, the 24 life stories are situated in the Chinese traditional and religious context where there is a serious lack of Christian witness. Therefore, family, work, and social status are distinctive variables. Thus, from the later three categories of barriers, four themes are derived:

- 1 Work is King
- 2 Busyness and Bitterness
- 3 The Filial Daughter-in-law
- 4 Life is Good

²²⁸ Fenggang Yang, "Chinese Conversion to Evangelical Christianity: The Importance of Social and Cultural Contexts," *Sociology of Religion* 59, no. 3 (1998).

In the following sections, the themes are presented through the life stories. A preliminary background of the informants is provided. Excerpts of the transcription are used to understand the barriers in their own voice. Additionally, for the purpose of highlighting the themes, I have edited the transcriptions with notations commonly employed by conversation analysts.²²⁹ I have selected and grouped the life stories so that the themes are densely and texturally projected.²³⁰ Hence, not all 24 stories will be treated with equal coverage. Journal extracts will be used to express feelings for the informants and issues that arose. Triangulated with the field notes and related literature, interpretation will be included in the stories.

As a researcher, as well as a learner, I aim to be objective yet aware of my subjectivity in the process of interpretation. Atkinson acknowledges that “a balance between subjectivity and objectivity is what usually works best in interpreting a life story.”²³¹

All the names used are fictitious in order to ensure anonymity. However, a Chinese name is employed for the purpose of personalization. Salutations are used so that the gender of Chinese fictitious name can be identified by English readers.

²²⁹ James A Holstein and Jaber F Gubrium, *The Self We Live by: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 243-244: Selected notations employed by conversation analyst:

- 1, Ellipses points ... indicate that some intervening talk has been omitted.
- 2, Single brackets [] indicate the researcher comments
- 3, Underlined indicates emphasis on a sentence, word or syllable
- 4, Multiple colons ::: indicate prolongation or stretching of sounds
- 5, Equal sign = indicates interrupted line
- 6, Double slashes // indicate overlapping talk among informants and researcher
- 7, Italic word indicates words originally spoken in Chinese or transliterated words.

²³⁰ Anselm L Strauss and Juliet M Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998), 124.

²³¹ Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 58.

5.1 Theme 1: Work is King

In the year 1914, *The Straits Times*²³² made some interesting comments about the Straits-born Chinese — Chinese not from China but those born in Malaya. It stated that Straits-born Chinese were not as hardy or persevering when compared to the China-born community. In general, they were not represented in the “skilled artisan or petty-trading classes.”²³³ However, they were diligent workers. *The Straits Times* describes the Straits Chinese as people who were willing to work in any kind of jobs —

As interpreters and clerks and as intermediaries they are indispensable in plantations, mining centers and works employing numbers of unskilled Chinese labor. At the wharves and on board ships they are storekeepers, tally-clerks and supercargoes. Watching the calm, composed, yet alert and *indefatigable* way in which the weighing and tally clerks fulfil their functions at the wharves, checking off the mixed and confusing package marks and serial numbers with unerring precision, one realizes the fact that though they may not develop the muscular powers of their race, they yet preserve intact the racial *penetrative* sensory qualifications.²³⁴ (*Italics mine*)

Out of the 24 informants, nineteen are Straits-born Chinese. They exhibited the trait of resiliency similar with their predecessors; they never tired of working, and the more they worked, the more energetic they became. During the interview, especially with the male informants, they shared their work with excitement. They grasped any opportunity that could help them earned some money.

For example, Mr. Ru who worked as a hawker,²³⁵ moved his “*barang barang*”²³⁶ from one location to another. He changed three different locations in one day in order to

²³² *The Straits Times* was originally established on July 15th 1845 in the early days of the British colonial rule. After the independence of Singapore from Malaysia, the paper became more focus on the island leading to the creation of the New Straits Times for Malaysian readers.

²³³ Moore and Moore, *The First 150 Years of Singapore*, 546.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ A hawker is one who sells any kind of goods or food in the market or along the street.

make more money. Mr. Chan was a coolie at first, earning his living by hard labor. When he was about forty years old, he became a wall painter. He learned his skills through his willingness to do all kinds of odd jobs. Mr. Ng became a driving instructor right after he passed his driving test. Simultaneously, he was also a taxi-driver and later, when opportunity came by, he became a businessman.

When I asked, “What is your dream when you are young?”

Mr. Ting said, “Dream? I worked. I don’t dream, I have no dreams.”

One of the female informants, Mrs. Mei, who had secondary four education,²³⁷ said her childhood dream was to become a nurse one day; but her English was bad and she ended up as a factory girl instead. The Chinese-speaking group in Singapore had a limited choice of jobs, and most of them had no choice; they took whatever jobs that came by. Having a childhood dream sounded foreign to them as work dominated their lives.

As for what led them to the church after their retirement, the majority of the informants revealed that they came to the church because of their children (13 occurrences). I asked Mr. Ting, that if he was still working, would he follow his children to the church?

He responded indirectly, “I do not do business now...”

I pursued, “And if you are still doing your business...?”

He frankly revealed, “When I was doing my business, I could not come, I have no time.”

²³⁶ *Barang barang*, a Malay word referring to personal belongings, here means the goods that he sold.

²³⁷ In the British education system, secondary four is equivalent to high school, sophomore.

I explored, “So do you think those who are still working will have a chance to follow Jesus?”

He said bluntly, “They will not listen, no way, they have to retire first. I asked those friends to come, but I could not move them an inch.”

All the informants were baptized after their retirement; hence, work posed the most formidable sociocultural barrier (19 occurrences) for these elderly to follow Jesus. When work was central to their lives, work was king. These informants were enslaved by their endless work.

What sustained them in the “indefatigable” and “penetrative” work? Did the informants also find pride, satisfaction, meaning, or even identity in the work that consumed their lives? What did religion mean to them? How did following Jesus redefine their past? In the following life stories, the sociocultural barrier of “work as king” is more vividly demonstrated.

5.1.1 Life Story of Mr. Ting (Born in Singapore; age, 79; baptized age, 71)

Mr. Ting was reluctant to be interviewed because he said he did not know how to express himself very well. I told him about the purpose of my interview and he agreed. He was often very brief in his response and at times there was silence as I waited for him to form his thoughts. As I anticipated, he would say, “*Aiyah*, don’t think too much *lah!*”

He said he has had a very difficult life, to such an extent that he did not want to think too much except to keep working. Although he repeatedly stressed, “don’t think too much,” I noted in my journal, “...he is thinking as I looked into his sorrowful eyes.” To him, “don’t think too much” is just a way of escaping from harsh reality. The

harshness of life forced him not to think too much; otherwise, life would be even more difficult to carry on.

Mr. Ting lived in the hilly area around Bukit Timah when he was born. He has two brothers and two sisters. He was second in position among his siblings, so they called him Number Two. What he could remember most vividly about his childhood were the quarrels of his parents—

Mr. Ting: My parents quarreled every day. Perhaps, because of money, they threw away things when they quarreled. My father was a hawker, and he sold vegetables that he planted himself. I have two brothers and two sisters. We were very poor. All my brothers and sisters have no chance for education...

I was a coffee boy when I was very young. I earned 30 dollars a month and gave all of it to my mother. I lived in the coffee shop and my boss provided me with three meals, so I didn't need any money.

Interviewer: Your mother must have loved you a lot...

Mr. Ting: = She loved me? I would be very lucky if she did not beat me. [Pause]

Interviewer: Are you angry when you think about her?

Mr. Ting: *Aiyah*, she goes to heaven already, angry for what? Don't talk about it, it is good to be *hum hum* [Teochew, meaning be naïve and ignorant and take it easy], don't think too much, so long as we can eat, can sleep, and can pass time, it is good enough.

Both his parents passed away when he was thirteen years old. The harshness of life and the absence of parental love drove him to work hard to make ends meet. Entering into the teenage years, he and his siblings had to learn how to be independent.

Mr. Ting: We stayed in the mountains, so we would have to go downhill to carry water every day. I helped in the grocery shop and also washed cars to earn some more money. I washed without any gloves on and my hands often bled. I did not think too much, just worked; work was tough. I also worked as a coolie until my friend taught me how to cook *Wanton* noodles...I forgot how long I have been selling *Wanton* noodles. When I first started, I had to run away from the police because I didn't have a

license. If I was not fast enough and got caught, I would have to pay a fine... Later, someone told me I could go and seek the MP [Member of the Parliament] for help. I went to see the MP and he helped me to apply for a stall in the market..

When I started my business in the market, I had to wake up at 3:30am every day, and by 5am I had to be ready to serve the customers. At about 3 to 4 in the afternoon, we had to prepare for the next day. I was as tired as a worm when the day is done. I worked seven days a week.

Mr. Ting retired at the age of 70 due to a steep downfall in his business. His business was disrupted because of the market's renovation. He was making a loss; thus he decided to rent his stall and retire. Since he was thirteen, Mr. Ting has worked for more than fifty years and most of his lifetime was mingling with Wonton noodles. He did not express whether he finds satisfaction in his work; he did not like to think too much, just keep on working.

Mr. Ting said if he was not retired, he would not have accepted his daughter's persistent invitations to come to the church and he would not be a Christian. To him, it is either working or following Jesus. Working and following Jesus cannot happen simultaneously. He figured if he was still working, he would not have time to come to the Sunday worship service, weekly senior adult fellowship, daily Bible-reading with his wife and the like. However, Mr. Ting said,

... *seng Zu* [Teochew, 信主, Believing in the Lord] is better; it is much simpler. Praying to other gods is very complicated and troublesome. I have to buy things to cook and have to remember different Chinese festivals.

Before *seng Zu*, Mr. Ting followed the Chinese tradition and prayed to his ancestor and *Da Bo Gong*. He could not remember when he first started but he continued praying to them after he was married at age twenty. He said he did not know much about the gods he prayed to but would pray for *peng ang* [Teochew 平安 means peace. For

Chinese, *peng ang* refers to physical safety and well-being] for the family with an incense stick each morning before he commenced his work. This practice became part of his life, and the Chinese traditional and religious practices were infused into his life although they were “complicated and troublesome”

When he made the shift to follow Jesus after retirement, he noted that “*seng Zu* is better , it is much simpler,” he held firmly that if one is working, one would have no time to follow Jesus. His decision to follow Jesus enabled him to redefine his past as “complicated and troublesome.” However, he still sees the barriers of work as formidable.

5.1.2 Life Story of Mr. Chan (Born in Singapore; age, 81; baptized age, 80)

It is difficult to determine when Mr. Chan first started working. His mother passed away when he was eight years old and his father brought him to his workplace where he lived there for the most of his childhood. He helped his father running odd jobs, like buying cigarettes or delivering food for him and other workers.

His father was very fierce and often caned him, sometimes even threatening him that he would use hot boiling water to pour on him while he was asleep. His father passed away when he was sixteen, and Mr. Chan was left all alone by himself, with only one year of education. He was the youngest in the family. His eldest brother was captured by the Japanese and did not return. The other brother and sister went separate ways and they lost contact with each other after his mother’s passing.

After his father’s death, Mr. Chan continued to work for his father’s employer until he was about twenty. With his little education, his only ability to make a living was by hard labor.

Mr. Chan: I worked all kinds of jobs, like help to carry water, and working as coolie in a provision shop. I even became a hawker selling porridge! But selling porridge did not last long, only for one or two months. It was in a night market. I started to sell when it turned night and worked till the next morning... I worked for another Shanghainese boss who was a carpenter. Like my father, I worked as a mover with him for about ten years. My boss made and repaired furniture for the British Army. Then, I joined a renovation company to do painting work...

At the age of 36, Mr. Chan was married through recommendation of his friends. He was unable to marry earlier because he had no money. Also, he did not know how to socialize. He told me that his wife was his first girlfriend. He knew his wife for two months and then they were married. He yearned for a home of his own but he could not afford so he lived with his wife's sister. This newly wedded couple, squeezed with his father-in-law, two sisters-in-law, and one brother-in-law in a three-room flat.²³⁸ Mr. Chan worked very hard to sustain the family.

Mr. Chan: After I was married, I had to restrain myself from spending money. If the family has nothing to eat, I would feel very shameful. I had to work, then we would have something to eat, and I would not have to borrow money from others. I would also be very ashamed if did not return the money... So long as there was work, there was no worry. It was not very difficult to find a job... But I was the sole bread-winner. I had to learn how to spend less and save more.

Life was tough at first but when you get used to it, it was ok. I started working when I was a little boy... I worked until I was 76. My last job was not too difficult, mainly painting and building partitions for offices' and apartments' rooms... When I was renovating others' homes, I always felt that others' homes were so well decorated compared to mine... I think if I did not work, I would be looked down by others... others have a mother, I don't have one; others can study, and I could not; others were rich, I am poor... but I don't think too much...I think the toughest is when there is no work to do.

²³⁸ This is one of the models of public housing in Singapore. Three-room flat has two bed-rooms and one living room, kitchen and one toilet.

Work defined his self-esteem. Work also gave him satisfaction, especially with the accomplishment of his children. He feels proud of his eldest son who attained a university degree... and his second daughter who works as a teacher for autistic children.

In terms of religion, Mr. Chan also prayed to *Da Bo Gong* at first because his mother prayed to *Da Bo Gong*. After he was married, he followed his wife and switched to Buddha. For Mr. Chan, praying to the family gods is women's businesses; he just followed. Mr. Chan and his wife now live with their daughter who is a Christian. What brought Mr. Chan to Jesus was his depression after he was retired.

Mr. Chan: I retired at 76 and felt very stressed without work. Three years later, I got depression, because I don't know why I worried a lot. The doctor told me I had depression. I felt very frustrated and unhappy because I didn't know what depression was. The doctor said depression needed a long time to recover and it is very expensive to see a private doctor. He recommended me to see a public doctor... I have been on medication for the past two years. If I do not take the medicine I will have bad dreams and won't sleep well...

My daughter invited me to *seng Zu*. My son-in-law's brother is a pastor, and he came and prayed for me. He invited me to *seng Zu* and stop praying to Buddha. That was at the end of 2012...

I was baptized last year; now I am very happy... Before I got depression, my wife kept nagging at me to go to the temple with her; if I did not go with her she became very angry. But after I got depression, she was ok with me in becoming a Christian. She prays to her god and I pray to mine... I think if it is not because of depression, I might not have become a Christian.

After retirement, many adults suffer from the 'retirement syndrome,' where they experience emptiness because their identities were often tied to their employment.²³⁹ In Singapore, the percentage rate of depression among older adults is 5.3% while 13-22% of

²³⁹ Moon Chan F. et al., "A Randomised Controlled Study to Explore the Effect of Life Story Review on Depression in Older Chinese in Singapore.," *Health & Social Care in the Community* 21, no. 5 (September 2013), 546.

the same target audience suffers from depressive symptoms.²⁴⁰ Mr. Chan was very honest to share that if it was not for his depression, he would not be a Christian. This crisis after his retirement led him to find a new identity and in a new community of faith. He now finds joy in the church.

Mr. Chan and Mr. Ting share many common characteristics; they both had a difficult childhood whereby their parents died in their early years. In fact, four other male informants and five female informants also shared that they had difficult childhoods. To those who are poor, life was tough. They are willing to work all kinds of jobs in order to raise their families. Among them, Mr. Low was an exception. He said he was considered rich during his times.

5.1.3 Life Story of Mr. Low (Born in Singapore; age, 78; baptized age, 74)

Mr. Low attained a secondary four education and he inherited the family business. He has four brothers and three sisters; he is second in birth order. All his siblings had a chance for education. Three of his younger brothers were all university graduates; two are teachers and the youngest became a doctor. He and his eldest brother helped his father in the family's provision shop. He had a happy and busy childhood.

Mr. Low: I started to help my father in his business when I was very young. We owned a provisional shop and sold dried goods like rice, sugar, corn...every time when the goods arrived, we had to pack and unpack so the job is never ending. My father employed five to six coolies, but my brother and I still have to help in the shop every day... as our shop was just beside our school, every time when we heard the school bell rang, we had to run to the school...

Our shop was right in the heart of the market, and we started very early in the morning. Before dawn broke, there were already a lot of people. Our

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

business was very good, and we collected a few thousand dollars a day. As there was no bank at that time, we kept the money in big rice bags. We paid our supplier without delay. We never owed others, only others owed us ... I didn't feel tired working every day, because I love to work.

At the age of 33, Mr. Low was married with his pen-pal. He is eleven years older than his wife. Mr. Low and his wife lived and worked with his parents until he started his own shop when he was about 44. He has three children. Like his father, he left the teaching of the children to his wife and he focused on his work.

Mr. Low: ... Life is very exciting at that time. I could control my finances, and I was very happy to make good profits. Before, when we worked for my father, we got no salary. When I was the boss, I gave my wife a salary, and she deposited it all into her bank account. She wanted to keep as much money as she could. I have a lot of money to count each day, but they are not mine ... [Chuckling]

Anyway, I was much happier when I was doing my business ... although there were a lot of things to be done each day - I had to go to the wholesale center to hunt for good and cheap stuff to sell, check stock, and do all the pricing myself ... We started from a provisional shop and developed into a supermarket ...

Though busy, Mr. Low beamed with joy as he reminisced about his work. He enjoyed making money. The satisfaction was great when he was able to improve on his father's business approach—his wife was paid! Work was tough, but it was in this toughness that determined his usefulness, thus meaning. In contrast, as he shared about his retirement, he dimmed. He felt out of place after retirement, even when he was at home.

Mr. Low: My kids are closer to my wife. They share everything with her, and look on me as though I am transparent... They seldom talk to me because I did not care for them while I was working. Also, my wife always reminded me that when she disciplined or punished the children, I cannot interfere. All my kids were taught by her... I seldom talked to my children. I am like my father; he seldom talked to me too. All the family matters are dealt by the mother... I think this is inherited. So I just tried to switch off and don't bother with it too much...

Mr. Low misses his work. One year after his retirement, he was diagnosed with cancer. Besides seeking medical treatment, he also sought peace and hope in his traditional belief. He followed his parents to pray to *Da Bo Gong* and their ancestor while they were living with them. When he moved out and started his own home, he followed his wife to pray to *Guan Yin*. No one shared the gospel with him while he was working.

Mr. Low: Before I became a Christian, I did not know anything about Christianity. I had no motivation to know about Jesus or the Cross and no one shared with us. In our neighborhood, most of them pray to idols. When I retired, I studied geomancy and spent a lot of money in the crystal stones.

His wife, also one of the informants, said Mr. Low spent almost \$10,000 in those crystal stones. It was in this period of illness, his sister-in-law invited him and his wife to the church. He was drawn closer to the church as he participated in the activities like Christmas celebration, evangelistic meetings, and church camp. His wife said, “Without these activities, it would have been impossible for us to walk in to the church.” Later, Mr. Low signed up for a Gospel course and he decided to be baptized. He experienced changes in his life. All the crystal stones, once precious to him, became useless. Also, he became more tolerating towards his wife’s dominating attitude.

Mr. Low: I think we are so old we have to treasure our time and be kind to one another. Some old couples can’t get along and get separated... Now I let her take the lead; I no longer feel uncomfortable about it. But she likes to nag on many minor things, and keep telling me that I am wrong, I am wrong! Before I would quarrel with her, now I tolerate...

Mr. Low is still learning how to make peace with his wife. He has been baptized for four years, but he expressed that he has done something very regretful that made him uncertain whether he is “qualified” to go to heaven.

Mr. Low: I believe in our Lord, but I am still not sure if I am qualified to go to heaven. If everyone wants to go to heaven, I don't think there will be enough space. I think I will float in the nature ... I just hope, I am not sure, if I am not qualified. I am half way in between; there are still a lot of trials. I only hope that dying is like sleeping... Life after death is good but not sure if the Lord will let me go to heaven ... We cannot be perfect; it is very difficult to be perfect. I think if I can attain 50 to 60 % [of perfection], I can go to heaven...

I want to become like Christ but it is difficult. I think for those who follow Christ when they are young, it is easier for them. For an old man like me, it is very difficult. There are changes but very little, bit by bit ... At first I thought I need to be 50 to 60% perfect then I can go to heaven, now I think I need to have 80% then he will save my soul... The Bible does not say this, but I think in this way...

Perhaps, due to his higher education and better upbringing, Mr. Low holds firmly to his perspective amidst uncertainty. He did not mention explicitly what he was still regretful about, but he is entrenched in his past wrongdoings. On one hand, he firmly believes in Jesus; on the other hand, he still doubts whether he was qualified for Jesus to save his soul. There are still barriers in following Jesus but as he said, he is changing bit by bit each day, and following Jesus will redefine his past bit by bit too.

From these life stories, work is a barrier for these informants to follow Jesus. Work dominated their lives and they had no time to think about other religions besides following the practice of their traditional and religious belief. Moreover, they found happiness, satisfaction and even self-worth in their work. Regardless of whether they were rich or poor, with or without education, work was the first priority in their lives. Although they were motivated to work hard because of their families, it turned out that their family and even their lives were ordered around their work.

5.2 Theme 2: Busyness and Bitterness

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines “bitterness” as a noun with two meanings: 1) sharpness of taste; lack of sweetness; and 2) anger and disappointment at being treated unfairly; resentment, as in “he expressed bitterness over his dismissal without notice.”²⁴¹ In terms of a taste, there is no difference with the Chinese understanding. In the second definition, there are some distinct differences between the West and the Chinese. The Chinese word for bitterness, 苦 *ku*, can be used as a noun, verb, adverb and also an adjective. Compared with the English as a noun, *ku* means something unbearable, like *chi ku*, 吃苦, which literally means eating of *ku*, which translates into “to suffer,” “have a rough time,” “hardships.”²⁴² Besides physical pain, it is something more than anger, disappointment and resentment as defined in the *Oxford Dictionary*. Bitterness is also a state of misery, acidity, pain, helplessness, being wrongly accused or treated and so forth. All these descriptions have to be taken into account in the Chinese context of “bitterness.”

In this section, the focus is on the female informants. This does not imply that the male informants have no bitterness in the harshness of life, but it was more distinctive among the female informants. One of the reasons is that most of the female informants have double roles to play. Out of the fourteen female informants, nine were working, and among them, only one was free from family responsibilities. The other eight have to take care of the family and the endless household chores. Only two out of the fourteen are

²⁴¹ “Bitterness: Definition of Bitterness in Oxford Dictionary (American English) (US),” accessed March 20, 2015, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/bitterness.“

²⁴² “苦, Accessed March 20, 2015 的英文翻译_英语怎么说_海词词典,” accessed March 20, 2015, <http://dict.cn/%E8%8B%A6>, accessed March 20, 2015.

housewives and the other three, though are housewives, had to help in their family or husband's business.

In terms of relationship, Chinese women are often caught in difficult positions with their in-laws. In the Chinese tradition, a daughter-in-law marries into the husband's family and she lives with them. An article, written in the early twenty century, *The Life of the Chinese Girl in Singapore*, depicts the difficult position of the daughter-in-law

The life of the newly made wife would be rendered far happier if there were no mother-in-law, who makes her lead a wretched existence by having tyrannically in the house. This tyranny and unjust treatment of the daughter-in-law is a special privilege of the mother-in-law, who exercises it without the least compunction or mercy. The poor wife becomes the drudge of the household, and must be ready to wait on her mother-in-law at all hours. Of course there are exceptions, but these are few indeed. ..²⁴³

However, in the process of nation building, Singapore Chinese families cannot live together due to the limitation of space. Seventy-five percent of Singaporean dwells in the HDB flats²⁴⁴ and the size of the flat cannot accommodate the Chinese practice of “three generations under one roof.” (*san dai tong tang*, 三代同堂) However, all the female informants were still caught in between the process of modernization; they experienced the complexities of in-laws relationship. Bitterness was easily harbored in this amidst of busyness, and it crippled them from religious matters, not to mention following Jesus.

5.2.1 The Life Story of Mrs. Meng (Born in China; age, 72; baptized age, 65)

Mrs. Meng came from a wealthy family before she was married, and her parents were Christian. In her childhood days, she followed her parents to the church and she

²⁴³ Moore and Moore, *The First 150 Years of Singapore*, 545.

²⁴⁴ HDB: acronym for Housing Development Board, a government sector that plans for Singapore public housing.

was also involved in the church choir. During her secondary school days, she fell in love with a non-Christian. She was attracted by his multiple talents. Her parents strongly objected to the relationship because they were incompatible— his family was very poor. Nevertheless, she insisted in the relationship and thus began her misery.

Mrs. Meng: I was married at the age of 22, and from a rich princess, I became a poor daughter-in-law. Not only did I have to serve my husband, I had to serve my mother-in-law and her mother and the three uncles. When I was home [her parent's home], I never ever had to wash the clothes; but immediately after I married, I had to wash all their clothes with my clumsy little hands. I sobbed as I washed. Besides washing the clothes, and the endless housework, I had to work. My husband and I were both teachers. My father-in-law had passed away and my husband was the eldest son; he had to bear the responsibility of his father.²⁴⁵ We had to raise the whole family including all the education expenses of his three brothers...

What was most unbearable for me was what my in-laws did to my eldest son. He was often ridiculed by my mother-in-law and the three uncles. While I was carrying my second son, they often threatened him that when the baby was born, no one would love him. My eldest son was an introvert by nature; when he was being threatened, he felt insecure and fearful. Sometimes when I was back from work, my mother-in-law would complain to me that my son was very naughty; she wanted me to discipline him. I did not want to argue with her. Without further interrogation, I caned my son...

When he was older, it was only then I discovered that he suffered from autism but I had missed the timing to help him. I felt so sorry for him.... I suffered a lot in this family, if it was not for the children, I would have left the family. But this was what I had chosen; I have to bear all consequences and endure all the hardship...

²⁴⁵ In the Chinese tradition, when the father passed away, the eldest son bears the responsible of the father.

In the Chinese tradition, a virtuous woman has to adhere to the teaching of “Three Obediences and Four Virtues.” [*San Cong Si De*, 三从四德]²⁴⁶ Mrs. Meng was taught by her parents to submit to her husband.

Mrs. Meng: I was so bounded by the Chinese traditional values [sigh]. There are good and bad; otherwise, I would have divorced with my husband... My life was filled with tears... when I was sick my mother-in-law still insisted on me to cook and do all the housework; she just didn't care. So even when I had medical leave, I still went to work because I could not rest at home... This was my life, a lot of miseries; but I tolerated... I dared not to leave because I was uncertain what would happen if I left, so I stayed.

Busyness and bitterness that resulted from the marriage she had chosen drew her away from following Jesus. After a long and heart-wrenching trial, she *chose* to become a Christian.

Mrs. Meng: I retired when I was 50. I think I needed a religion but I devoted my time to gardening and bakery. I always cried. Everything was so grey and I felt so bored with life. I cried non-stop... My friends asked me if I wanted to see a psychiatrist, I rejected the suggestion and said I could control it. I was so depressed and I hoped I could die earlier. But when I thought of my eldest son, I could not feel at ease. If I died before my husband, who would there be to take care of him? I did not know what to do, so I should find a religion... I had two choices: Buddhism or Christianity.

I remembered when my mother passed away, I felt more comfortable with the Christian funeral so I decided to look for a Christian church... I went back to the church where my parents worship... At the same time, I also indulged in *Zi Wei Dou Shu* [紫微斗数 Starfortune zeweistar, a kind of Chinese astrology]. I bought a lot of books to study about it. I calculated my fate and my husband's. After checking the many calculations, I found out that if my husband could still be alive after age 70 years, our lives would be very good. I calculated mine too, and found out that my death age was about 65 to 66. I was so panicked, and I quickly signed up for baptism. [Laugh] I did not dare to tell anyone...

²⁴⁶ “The Three obediences” that requires from the Chinese woman include obeying the father before marriage, obeying the husband in marriage and obeying the sons in widowhood. “The Four Virtues” are fidelity, physical charm, propriety in speech and efficiency in needle work.

After I was baptized, I was quite satisfied [with herself and her family]... my eldest son is not as bad tempered as before. Although he is still autistic, he could still work... I still feel so sorry for him because I did not protect him when he was young. I am willing to take care of him as long as I can...

Sufferings have made me stronger; otherwise, I would have committed suicide. Now as I think of my life, I no longer feel pitiful. I feel like I am watching a drama serial. This is a good drama but not a good life... Why are there so many sufferings in my life? They say if we did many wrongs in the previous life, we will have to suffer in this life. Is this so? I don't know, but I just have to explain it in this way; if not, how?

Mrs. Meng had no time to think about herself, only after retirement. Ironically, her life fell apart at a stage when she supposed she could relax and enjoy. It was in this dilemma that compelled her to seek a religion, and she chose the same religion as her parent's. She chose through her observation, comparison, and personal favor.

Although she is a baptized-Christian, the norms and values of Chinese tradition still dominates her way of thinking as she follows Jesus. This is understandable, as one of the modes of conversion experience is a gradual process of turning towards Jesus.²⁴⁷ Elderly converts sometimes still retain or replace the ideology from their tradition religion. Mrs. Meng uses the concept of *karma* in Buddhism to explain her sufferings. Buddhism emphasizes the attaining of good *karma*; therefore, one has to do more good deeds in order to ensure a happy future.²⁴⁸ Mrs. Meng did not show any inclination of doing good for the sake of her next incarnation or for her family, but the mode of "doing something," has been implanted in her life. She admitted in the interview that she cannot sit still; she has to do something.

²⁴⁷ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light : Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). From the examples of conversion experiences in the New Testament, Gaventa defines conversion in three modes of personal change: alternation, conversion and transformation, whereby, alternation is a relatively limited form of change that develops from one's previous behavior.

²⁴⁸ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica.*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), Vol 15, 274.

Bitterness hurts relationships. If it is not dealt with, reconciliation will be challenging even when one follows Jesus; thus, it becomes a hindrance for one to follow Jesus freely. The story of Mrs. Jin and my mother further demonstrates the vice of bitterness.

5.2.2 Life Story of Mrs. Jin (Born in Singapore; age, 73, baptized age, 71)

Mrs. Jin showed me the cross she has been wearing for more than fifty years, even when she was not a Christian. She said she likes the cross simply because it is simple and she does not like complicated things. But Mrs. Jin has many complicated unresolved life issues -- she does not understand why her parents hate her, why she married her husband, why her kids are not close to her despite her many sacrifices, why she has no friends she can trust, what is the purpose of living, why all the gods left when she arrived to meet with them, and so forth. Since her baptism two years ago, she has not seen much change in her life.

Mrs. Jin was a little surprised why I chose her as my informant because she said her life is full of bitterness, nothing sweet. She thought that I was collecting conversion stories, what Chinese called *jian zheng*, [见证 testimony], and there are good *jian zheng* and bad ones. A good *jian zheng* is stereotyped as a dramatic conversion from bad to good, like the conversion of drug-addict or alcoholic when they transformed into a new creation after they met Christ. Mrs. Jin said she has no good *jian zheng* to offer. But as I told her the purpose of my research, she felt honored that she could still contribute as a “bad” *jian zheng*.

She is the eldest among her ten siblings. Even at a young age, she was expected to take on many household chores: washing the clothes for more than ten people, carrying

drinking water for the whole family, and even preparing the daily meals. She had to do a lot of housework when she was a little girl; being the eldest sister was just like being a mother. She did not have an opportunity for education because her mother needed her to perform the daily chores.

Mrs. Jin: I did not have a good childhood. I never felt that my parents loved me... I thought my mother was not my birth mother... I did not receive any love either from my parents, siblings, my children, or my husband... my mother punished me till my head swelled, and without telling me why. She didn't love me. One instance, while I was carrying my third brother who was still a baby, I tripped upon a stone and fell flat on my face. [sighing and laughing at herself] I was only slightly over ten years old... When my siblings were older, I worked as a maid in European households from age 22 to 30... All my earnings went into the support of my siblings' education. They are grown-ups now; only my youngest brother understands that I was supporting them and not our parents...

My parents prayed to *Da Bo Gong* so I carried on praying to *Da Bo Gong* even after my marriage... Praying to *Da Bo Gong* requires a lot of work — I had to offer a lot of food, yet we couldn't finish them after praying. There is no real *peng ang* [peace] in my family... I would go worship whatever gods other people introduced to me. I even followed friends to the Thai temple. Once a year, I went to *Hatyai*²⁴⁹ with my friends... whenever I received words that this or that god was anointed or answered prayer, I would visit. But when I arrived, the god had left; hence, I was frightened...

Mrs. Jin was married at the age of 30, considered a late marriage. She had no intention to enter into marriage. Her explanation was that she fated to her husband although she did not love him at all. She was forced by her parents.

Mrs. Jin: There's a saying that says, *sior kiam zeh* [Teochew, 相欠债 means "indebted to one another"] and I say, "I was indebted to the loan shark". [Laughing at herself] I'm still paying his interest these days... His parents came to visit my family. I was forced into the marriage. Traditionally, parents were the decision-makers, I had no say at all...

²⁴⁹ A city in the southern of Thailand, near the Malaysian border, popular for its world's third largest reclining Buddha.

My husband was a vegetables vendor. When my children were around 2-3 years old, I started taking them with me to the market. My husband chased us away from the market despite the crowd... When we went home that day, it was obvious that he was upset at me. I still don't understand why he did not want us to be there. If he didn't want me to be there, he could just say so, but he did not... I was being treated worse than a dog in the market. However, I still went to help him; I just had to be very "thick skinned" and act as if nothing was wrong. I continued to help him until he quit running the stall...

We quarreled every day, even over every minor things... children, money, business... When I asked him for \$50 more, he said, "I will be dragged to death by you." I retorted that he should find me a wealthy man with whom I can take my children and just leave... He chided me for this. I am a straightforward person. I just said this to his face. If I was literate or possessed a skill, I would have left him and I wouldn't have cared less. No choice, no choice, no choice. Tell you something embarrassing: whenever he wanted his needs met, he would be very affectionate. After that, he would just be his old self again... but in the Chinese traditional, people just carried on... I had this fear that I'd be mocked at or despised if I asked for a divorce. I decided to let nature take its course, and with the well-being of my children on my mind, I tolerated him year after year...

Toleration with no hope of reconciliation harbors bitterness. Mrs. Jin told her story without much emotion as though she was telling others' story. Perhaps, she tried to distance herself from her misery. Indifference was her approach to protect herself from being further hurt. However, when she talked about her son, she became more emotional. At certain points in her sharing, her eyes were watery. And that was how she came to the church.

Mrs. Jin: While my son was in the army [serving in the army is mandatory for all men in Singapore], he encountered evil spirits. I sought many so-called Gods but to no avail... My younger sister, a Christian, asked me, 'You worshipped idols but your family enjoys no *peng ang* ... if someone invites you to church, you'd better go.' About five years ago, my neighbor brought me to church although my sister had been encouraging me...

I came to the church to seek deliverance from demonic possession for my son. He was possessed by an evil spirit after he was enlisted. He signed on as a regular for five years. I sought many so-called gods and even invited a medium to my home. I spent a lot of money but still my son was

like that, no change...I sought help everywhere... I have to save my child, even unto death. He was still young, and his future was in my hands. I would give my life for my child [she cried out with tears running in her eyes]. I came to church to seek for God's help...

Ever since I attended this church and gave him a lot more of my attention, gradually his condition improved... Three years ago, I decided to baptized and give my life to Him because God helped me a lot and I felt very good... After I have *seng Zu* I prayed that I could gain health and joy and also prayed that God will change my son's short-temperedness into patience... But even after my baptism, I still feel the same... Life has no meaning, and I have no interest in anything. I returned the joy to the church once I am out of the door of the church [laughing hopelessly]... Hope God will touch me one day... Yes, God changed my temper; before I was very hot-tempered due to environmental circumstances. Sometimes I felt very frustrated when I faced my husband's long face. Maybe, this is a reciprocal reaction... Staying at home makes me very frustrated, so I just hope that my legs would continue to be strong and I can go out every day so I don't have to depend on anyone else...

From childhood to adulthood, Mrs. Jin worked hard for her family without any compensation, not to mention satisfaction. Entering elderhood, her bitterness was not resolved. She did not feel love by those whom she had worked her life for. She sighed, "Even both my children whom I love dearly disregard me." She feels hopeless with these relationships.

Her way to find hope was through her tradition beliefs. Initially, she prayed to whatever gods who could help her, and later, the Christian God became one of the gods she prayed to. She was baptized because her son was delivered from the evil spirits, and some of her needs were met. However, relationships with her family members were still broken.

Situated in her sociocultural context where life was tough and familial relationships were entangled, busyness and bitterness continues to be her barriers to follow Jesus. These barriers are not uncommon to the other informants. The story of my

mother in chapter one, also one of the informants, share many common characteristics with Mrs. Jin:

- Their life was tough, and they had little or no opportunity for education.
- They did not feel loved by their mother and their loved ones.
- They had no control over their marriages.
- Family was the centrality of their lives.
- They did not divorce because of their children.
- They could not get along with their children.
- They prayed to *Da Bo Gong* for peace but in no avail.
- They were trapped in familial relationships.
- They followed Jesus because of felt-needs.
- After baptism, they continue to feel insecure and bitter with life.
- They found some joy and hope when they participated in the church activities.

5.2.3 My Mother's Life Story (Born in China; age, 79; baptized age, 61)

My mother was baptized eighteen years ago, with some obvious changes in her life like a better temper, becoming more reliant on God; yet the sense of bitterness and loneliness still overwhelms her.

My mother: ...I have five children and ten grandchildren, why am I always alone? My tenant has lived with me for five years; he asked me why my kids did not come and visit me. How am I going to reply? ... All my life, I have lived for my children, and all my children have let me down... But *seng Zu* is very good, every time when the house is very quiet, I will talk to the Lord. I pray twice a day, I will give thanks to the Lord to give me a good night sleep, so I can have good health. I repeat this prayer every day...

So long as God gives me the ability to walk, I can walk out of this house, I am ok. My legs are in pain sometimes, I force myself to walk. If I cannot walk out of this house, my life will be miserable. I ask God to give me good health because I don't want to be a burden to others...

As observed in these two life stories, their faith in Jesus is based on their needs being met. Mrs. Jin followed Jesus because her son was healed. In the case of my mother, initially, she followed Jesus because she thought I would live with her till her death. Although she was disappointed, she experienced the peace of God and her temper

was transformed. She believes that God will hear and respond to her prayer. Still, their bitterness obstructs their relationship with their loved ones, thus with God.

5.3 Theme 3: The Filial Daughter-in-law

Chinese tradition places great emphasis on filial piety, it is the core idea of Confucianism.²⁵⁰ Traditionally, filial piety is usually linked with the son. The protagonists in the Chinese classics, *Er Shi Si Xiao* (二十四孝 Twenty-four stories of Filial Piety) are all about the son.²⁵¹ However, in reality, the daughter-in-laws often play the major role in taking care of the parents-in-law and the family. The daughter-in-law, particularly the wife of the eldest son, is obligated to perform most of the duties in the family such as preparation and executing the rituals of religious or ancestral worship at home.

For the female informants, besides busyness and bitterness that cause barriers for them to follow Jesus, fulfilling family obligations is another.

Mrs. Long is not baptized because of her mother-in-law's strong objection. Although her mother-in-law did not treat her well, she still shows respect to her. Mrs. Long claims that she is a Christian even though she is not yet baptized.

She experienced many miracles in her life. After her first pregnancy, she was diagnosed with a series of illnesses such as hemorrhages, ovarian cancer, and heart disease. Each time she cried out to Jesus, she was healed. She could feel the presence of Jesus in her life, protecting and providing for her. However, she was not baptized until

²⁵⁰ Kwang-Kuo Hwang, "Filial Piety and Loyalty: Two Types of Social Identification in Confucianism.," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 2, no. 1, Theoretical and methodological advances in social psychology (April 1999).

²⁵¹ There is another Chinese Classic, "*Nu Er Shi Si Xiao*," Twenty-four filial stories of Women, but not as well-known.

her mother-in-law's passing so that she can venerate her in her funeral. She was baptized at the age of 62. Being filial was a barrier for her to claim Lordship of Jesus in her life.

Mrs. Chuan was entrusted by her mother-in-law to take care of the ancestor's altars before her passing. Mrs. Chuan wanted to be baptized, but she did not know what to do with the ancestor altars. She handed the responsibility of the ancestor's altar to her step-mother-in-law's son. But she was criticized by both her Christian's friends and her non-Christian relatives. Her Christian friend said she should share the gospel with her non-Christian relatives instead of letting them into more demonic encounters. Her relatives complained that she denied her ancestors when she became Christian.

How should one deal with the ancestor altars appropriately? Can a filial daughter-in-law also be a faithful follower of Jesus? To these Chinese elderly, what is the significance of baptism? Among the fourteen female informants, Mrs. Ai's life story is very unique as a filial daughter-in-law. In fact, she is more than a filial daughter-in-law. She felt called to take care of her non-believing relatives at the price of her communion with Christ through baptism. After a long yearning for baptism, she was touched by the Spirit to take care of her entrusted relatives differently.

5.3.1 Life Story of Mrs. Ai (Born in Singapore; Age, 79; baptized age, 71)

Mrs. Ai's life story is a series of adoptions. First, she was adopted by her uncle. Next, her father-in-law entrusted his brother to Mrs. Ai's care, which shares the essence of adoption. Again, when his father-in-law's brother was on the death bed, he entrusted his sister to Mrs. Ai. Over and over again, Mrs. Ai's baptism was delayed because those entrusted to her were Daoist.

Mrs. Ai's father passed away when she was three. His father requested his brother to take care of his family before his death. Thus her uncle and aunty became her foster-parents. They were Catholics and treated her like their own daughter. Mrs. Ai had a happy childhood with her foster-parents.

When Mrs. Ai was eighteen, her relatives match-made a marriage for her to a Christian man; but her mother, a very superstitious Daoist, strongly objected because she did not like Christians. But later, she gave in...

Mrs. Ai: Honestly, she agreed to the marriage because she was heavily in debt. The match-maker told her that if she agreed to the marriage, her debt would be cleared because my husband's family was rather wealthy; hence, she agreed... But I told my mother-in-law that I could only be her daughter-in-law on one condition: I have to wait until my mother's *bei ni* [百年 Teochew, means 100 years which implies death], then I can become a Christian. She consulted her pastor and the match-maker talked to my mother. The pastor said I have to accept Christ first. I assumed that my baptism can be delayed until my mother's *bei ni*...

The first time I met my husband was during my wedding, and I realized that he was a cripple, so it was very difficult for him to find a good match. I only saw his picture before the wedding... I was filled with grievance. Some of my friends told me that I could call off the marriage, or file a divorce. But I know I cannot do that; otherwise, I would have a bad reputation. So I accepted it as my fate.

One year after she was married, her father-in-law became very ill. Among his sons and daughter-in-laws, Mrs. Ai displayed certain traits that enabled her father-in-law to trust her, and he entrusted his brother to her care.

Mrs. Ai: ... My father-in law said his younger brother was very pitiful. His daughter was handicapped, and his son was retarded. I said, "I am willing to take care of him but I am not the eldest daughter-in-law; the rest of the family has to agree first." My mother-in-law and the eldest daughter-in-law responded that whoever he wanted to entrust was up to him. Therefore, my father-in-law entrusted his eldest brother, who was a Daoist, to me.

Her father-in-law passed away followed by her mother. The uncle who entrusted to her by her father-in-law led a long life. So Mrs. Ai's baptism was further delayed. To her father-in-law, entrusting meant taking care of her uncle when he was alive and also all the matters after his death.

Mrs. Ai: Before my *Lao Zeiak*'s passing, [Teochew 老叔, means great-uncle, refer to the brother of her father-in-law. In the Chinese tradition, often the mother follows the children in addressing. Mrs. Ai's children address him as great-uncle and she follows. He was actually her uncle.] he entrusted his daughter, who was handicapped, to me. He called me *Seng Nio* [Teochew 圣娘, Holy Mother], I often told him not to call me that... He struggled with his last breathe for a long time. I asked my husband why he was still hanging it there. My husband said he has a lot of worries. So I stepped forward and asked him, "If you cannot talk just nod your head, ok?" I said, "You are going to meet with your old ancestors; you can go peacefully... If you have any burdens, you can tell me." He held my hand tightly, and said, "I am worrying about your *Ah Gou* [Teochew 姑姑, *Lao Zeiak*'s daughter. She is actually her cousin]" I said, "Why worry? She has children." He said, "They are all useless; she has two boys and three girls. They all don't want to take care of their mother. Her husband went sailing and never came back..." I said, "I am in a very difficult position, I have to work very hard to raise my family as my husband cannot work, and I have a lot of responsibilities on my shoulder..." But I assured him, "When I am alive I will take care of your daughter." I remembered I said this at twelve noon, then he passed away three hours later.

This *Ah Gou* was not a Christian... I think I was touch by the Holy Spirit, I told her, "*Ah Gou*, I can take care of you, but I have one condition: you have to follow me... I am going to *seng Zu* very soon. You are a Daoist, and I cannot help you to deal with all the Daoist ritual..." It was God who touched me to say all this. My *Ah Gou* was caught in a dilemma. I did not force her; I gave her time to consider. Later, she said her children objected. I said, "I cannot wait for her. All my kids are Christian except me. My husband is a Christian when he was young... If one is Christian and the other is not, it is bad, it is bad for the children too...I feel bad when I am not baptized. I have also promised my children that I will be baptized one day."

As promised to her uncle, Mrs. Ai still took care of her cousin's daily needs except the matters after death were left pending. Mrs. Ai also brought her to the church; later she was baptized despite objections from some of her children.

Before Mrs. Ai was baptized, she always felt something was missing with her faith in Jesus. Even her five children did not consider her a Christian; this was reflected in the response of her eldest son's girl-friend.

Mrs. Ai: When my eldest son was 22 years old, he had a girlfriend... I told her, "If you want to be my son's girlfriend, you have to be a Christian." She was puzzled. I knew she must be thinking, "You are not a Christian; how can I say this?" I told her, "I will be a Christian one day."

Mrs. Ai was baptized at the age of 70; all her children were overwhelmed with joy. But whether she was baptized or not, she did not change her attitude in loving and caring of her relatives and the people around her. So what does baptism mean to Mrs. Ai?

Mrs. Ai: In fact, I knew I was already a Christian when I was married, because the pastor had already prayed for me. But when I told my children I was going to be baptized, they were very excited and happy... I was baptized at the age of 70... I did not think much about the meaning of baptism now, so long as I firmly believe... baptism has not much meaning to me.

Mrs. Ai did not imply that baptism is not important. Although delayed, she never forgot her baptism. However, whether she was baptized or not, she lives the way she should live, and continues to love and care those who came to her. Baptism did not affect how she lives. Without baptism is a barrier for others to follow Jesus, but in the case of Mrs. Ai, she knows whom she is following. Baptism affects how others look at her, but it does not affect her relationship with Jesus. However, baptism is still important to her.

Like many of the female informants, Mrs. Ai had no chance for education; she had to work, and at the same time care of the family. Her life was tough, yet she did not harbor bitterness, only more love. One of the reasons was that she had experienced love from her *Ah Pei* and *Ah Mm* after her father's decease. Her *Ah Pei* and *Ah Mm* shaped her life. Mrs. Ai said that if they were still around, and if she had the chance to serve and

love them, she would feel so blessed. Hence, education or wealth is never the deciding factors in one's behavior; love is.

Another incident happened one year after her baptism.

Mrs. Ai: This was about my biological brother. His wife passed away and he also became very ill. All his kids -- he has five girls and four boys -- did not want to take care of him. My brother said he wanted to follow me; I told him, "If you want to follow me, you must become a Christian; otherwise, I cannot help you deal with the matters when you passed away..." I consulted my pastor and he visited him and shared the gospel with him...My brother was baptized four months before he passed away. His children wanted to use the Daoist ritual; I objected. They dared not to say anything because they did not take care of their father.

Genuine love and practical care was demonstrated in Mrs. Ai's life story. She is always ready to shoulder responsibility, and thus, had the courage to speak up to those unfilial sons and daughters of her relatives.

The life of Mrs. Ai began with the tragedy of her father's death; but with much hardship and persistence, she is now enjoying her fruits in her elderly years. She has fifteen grandchildren, two great grandchildren. Every Saturday, all her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren gather in her apartment. She speaks in Teochew to all her children, and they understand her language. Most of her grandchildren were raised by her when they were born. As she said, "I have a life *yuan yuan man man*." (圆圆满满, round and complete)

As mentioned, Mrs. Ai is a very unique person. Not only did she overcome the bondage of tradition, she went beyond the traditions of a daughter-in-law. However, there are still a large number of elderly who are entangled in familial relationships, bounded by tradition and religious practice. Showing respect to their in-laws and dealing

with the ancestor altars are still barriers to many filial daughter-in-laws who want to be baptized and follow Jesus.

5.4 Theme 4: Life is Good

When Singapore was still a developing country in the 1960s, education was viewed with the greatest hope to nation building.²⁵² In the book, *The Politics in Developing Areas*, a Western form of education is viewed as providing an opportunity to enter into a new world in which power, wealth, and comfort are available to all.²⁵³ Education equips people and makes them believe that they could manage their own lives. When there is a will, there is a way; nothing is impossible for human beings to overcome.

Thus when Christians make these claims:

- All human beings are sinners, depraved, crippled of doing good.
- The only way to salvation is through believing in Jesus.
- If you do not believe in Jesus, you will go to hell.

Many informants, especially those who have attained higher levels of education, are infuriated by such comments. They believe they can manage their lives well and are contributing to the building of the nation.

Before Mrs. Wang became a Christian, her impressions of Christians were that “they are very unreasonable and radical.” She comments, “There are so many people in the world, some do not have the opportunity to know Christianity, among them are many

²⁵² Gopinathan, *Towards a National System of Education in Singapore, 1945-1973*, vii, 1.

²⁵³ Gabriel A Almond and James Smoot. Coleman, *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), 106.

kind-hearted people; they are generous to those in need, how can Christians say that these people will go to hell?”

Mrs. Chuan also feels the same way. She said, “I feel offended when Christians say that if you don’t become a Christian, you will be knocked down by a car... and they criticized those praying to other gods as praying to wood.” Mr. Ang shared that he did not reject or show bias towards any religion, even Christianity, but he avoided Christians who distributed tracks or pamphlets. Implicitly, he did not have a good impression of Christians.

All three were the better educated among the 24 informants. They have acquired what education has given them power, at least to lead the life they wanted; sufficient wealth to maintain the high standard of living in Singapore and thus enjoying the comfort of lives. They were the most likely to adhere to the belief that their life is good and they felt no need to follow Jesus.

Singapore has developed into a first world country in less than five decades. Most children in Singapore now attend school for ten years. The literacy rate in 2013 reached 96%.²⁵⁴

Life is good in Singapore; but it has also become a barrier for Singaporeans to follow Jesus. I have chosen the life stories of Mr. Ang and Mrs. Wang in this theme as they are both the youngest among the male and female informants. Their stories bring us closer to the current context of Singapore as a developed nation.

²⁵⁴ “Singapore: December 2014, Country Report,” *Political Risk Yearbook: Singapore Country Report* (January 2015), .

5.4.1 Life Story of Mr. Ang (Born in Singapore; age, 62; baptized age, 61)

Mr. Ang describes himself as “an introvert and afraid to interact with strangers.” He is also a happy-go-lucky person; he does not like to think or make plans. Perhaps, as he is the youngest among the nine siblings, he was “well-protected, most-loved and most-pampered” by his parents. His father was very strict and would use the leather belt to discipline them. But it was never used on Mr. Ang as he was the youngest. Also, Mr. Ang saw how his brothers were being strapped; hence, he learned how to avoid being punished from their experiences. Nevertheless, he admired and respected his father who passed on when he was in his teens.

Mr. Ang: My late-father was a very resourceful person... he manufactured and sold vermicelli, marketed biscuits as well as owned a sago factory... the whole family help to dried the sago... We had to rely on the weather; when the sun was at its peak around noontime, we had to clear the dried ones and dry the fresh ones. When it rained, we had to compete with time... when we gather together as siblings, we share the recollection of hardship with joy...

All his siblings had the opportunity for education but they did not do very well in school. Mr. Ang completed his GCE ‘O’ level exam²⁵⁵ and only his results were sufficient to enable him to continue his studies in the Vocational Institute. He studied electrical engineering with no interest or aim. So long as he had the opportunity to study, he kept on. Life was quite smooth after he graduated and he served in the national service for two-and-a-half years.²⁵⁶ He worked as an electrician for about two years and then ventured into his own bakery business. He was very busy with his business and had no time for friends.

²⁵⁵ General Certification of Education Ordinary level, in Singapore, it is a qualification jointly offered by Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) and the Singapore Ministry of Education.

²⁵⁶ Serving in the army is mandatory for all male Singaporeans. The duration is two or two and a half years depending on the educational qualification. It was adjusted to two years for all males citizen in 2004.

His mother passed away after his national service, so he had no parental pressures for being single. He committed his time to his career. He was introduced to his wife in his thirties. Initially, he was lukewarm towards the relationship until he felt that, “time was not on my side.” He yearned for companionship. He was married at about 40 years of age. They have no children, and it was a decision made at the outset of their marriage.

Mr. Ang: I was doing very well with my bakery shop initially. However, after I married, it started going downhill. Then, my wife asked if she brought me bad luck or curse? I said no... I was a Buddhist, but I prayed to whatever gods that could help me in my business.

His wife was baptized in her secondary school days. She followed her friends into baptism without understanding why she took the action. She was not a regular church attendee and stopped attending church after they were married.

Mr. Ang When I was at the peak of my career, she would help me on weekends to save labor costs... When I was at the lowest point in my career, my wife encouraged me instead of arguing or quarrelling. She would say, “Never mind that there is no business today. Tomorrow will be better.” She did not expect me to bring home the bread and butter. She was working too and she supported the family while I was making a loss... Later, she confided that on her way to work, she would pray for me every day...

She neither attempted to share the gospel nor chided me for praying to so-called “gods.” She demonstrated it through her life. She led by example. Hence, I now understand verbal communication may not be a necessary tool to share the Gospel. She did not stop me from worshipping other gods or insist that I attend church with her. She also did not say prayers in my presence... I saw her sacrifice... I thought to myself that when I retire, I shall accompany her to church...

Mr. Ang wound down his business and retired at the age of 59. As promised, they looked for a church together and two years later, he was baptized. Beside regular worship and cell group fellowship, they are both serving in the senior ministry. For the past year, Mr. Ang and his wife have been praying, reading the Bible, praising and

worshipping at home for at least two hours each day. This is an exception among the elderly couples I interviewed.

Mr. Ang: My wife said, “You see, the church leaders always told me to bring someone but I didn’t bring anyone.” I said, “You brought me.” She always blamed herself for this but I told her, “I would not have believed in the Lord...”

I don’t have many ups and downs in my life, I would not have accepted what others shared if it is not for my wife.

Life is good for Mr. Ang such that he did not see the need for religion, not to mention following Jesus. Without the appropriate and sacrificial love of his wife, Mr. Ang might have continued to lead a “good” life without Christ. Life is good blinds him from the need for Christ.

5.4.2 Life Story of Mrs. Wang (Born in Singapore; age, 64; baptized age 65)

Quite similar to Mr. Ang, Mrs. Wang was also baptized a year ago. Her father was a school principal, and her mother, a housewife. She has many siblings, positioned fourth among her four sisters and three brothers. Oftentimes, she feels neglected by her father until she protested one day.

Mrs. Wang: When my father was going out, he could not possibly bring the seven of us. When the occasion is suitable for the bigger ones, he would bring the first, second and the third eldest. When the occasion is suitable for the little dotes, he would bring the first, second and the third youngest. So I was always left out. When I was about primary four or five, I can’t remember exactly, I protested and asked, “Am I too old or too young?” My father was awakened and thereafter, if it was for the older ones, I would be the older one; and if it was for the younger ones, I would be with the younger ones.

Mrs. Wang learned how to deal with complicated relationships since she was young. She described her father as a male chauvinist but a responsible person. Her mother was a good woman of “*san cong si de*” (Three Obediences and Four Virtues)

who never questioned the husband. Praying to the ancestors was their family tradition. All children were well-educated. Mrs. Wang wanted to be a doctor at first, but due to financial burdens, her father could not support her to medical school. She self-supported and attained a teaching degree. She said, “I cannot become a doctor but I am still a doctor; I am “the engineer to the soul.”²⁵⁷

She came to know her husband while she was in the secondary school. Although they were in different schools, they met each other at the bus-stop and then he started the courtship. She was married at the age of 21.

Mrs. Wang: [Smile] Being a husband, he attained 90 points [that is, rates a 9 out of 10]... my husband would bring me out for holiday once or twice a year... Although I was a working woman, I still had to cook for the whole family, my parents-in-law, my two *gu gu* [姑姑 Husband's sister] and three *shu shu* [叔叔 Husband's brother]. I have some issues with my mother-in-law...she was very picky in her diet, I had to think of ways to satisfy her... I get along with my husband's sisters and brothers very well. When my *da gu* [大姑, husband's eldest sister] wanted to get married, my mother-in-law was not satisfied with the marriage. As my *da gu* is very closed to me; I helped her in her marriage. My father-in-law also wanted me to be involved. But my mother-in-law felt offended because I had over-ridden her authority as a mother... However, I tried to patch things up by organizing outings and book holiday chalets for the whole family every year.

Mrs. Wang has a supportive husband and she is able to enjoy a big and complicated yet harmonious familial relationship. She has two children. Her son is a doctor and her daughter is married with a Christian.

Mrs Wang: Both my husband and I are freethinkers, and we respect all religions. This was what we pledged being Singaporean. No matter what we believe in, we have to show respect to other's religion. That was what I taught my students. I also told me kids that they can choose whatever they want to believe, but only when they are 21...

²⁵⁷ “Engineer of the soul,” 灵魂的工程师, in Chinese it refers to teacher. Doctor fixes the physical body but teacher fixes the soul.

My thought was so long as I do not hurt anyone, whether I have a religion or not does not matter. If I have a religion and do something immoral or unjust, my religion would be in vain. The most important thing is not to hurt others.

Both her children became Christian when they were in the university. Mrs. Wang managed her family and her life very well and she did not see the need to follow her children to become a Christian. Her friends and relatives often told her enviously, she has the best of life. It was only until her son was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 38, at the peak of his career as a doctor, her life fell apart.

Mrs. Wang: The oncologist said he can live no longer than three months...My son kept asking, why? Why must be him? Why at this time of his life? He prayed to God for more time. One week later, he went for his check-up, his oncologist told him that there is a kind of treatment that is for woman and it happened to suit him. God gave him another three years...

Her son and daughter-in-law moved over to her place so that she could take care of him. In was during this period of her son's illness that she knew more about the love of God. Her son started a Bible study group with his professor and colleagues in her house. Week after week, Mrs. Wang and her husband learned more about Christianity.

Mrs. Wang: My son invited us to become Christian, so that we can meet in heaven... [weeping] I give thanks to the Lord that he gave us this extra time together... My son wrote me a note on Mother's Day, he said, "Every child can only enjoy mother's love once when they are young. I am so fortunate, I can enjoy it twice." I was very touched that when he was sick, he felt how much I love and care for him.

Three years later, her son passed away. Mrs. Wang and her husband were baptized one year later. She was still mourning while she shared her story with me. However, without the demise of her son, perhaps, Mrs. Wang would never have felt the need to follow Jesus. Loss of a loved one led her to the awareness of the void in her good life.

5.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, four themes were presented through the life stories of the 24 informants. In the theme, “Work is King,” the lives of the informants were ordered around their work. Nevertheless, they still found happiness, satisfaction and self-worth in their work. When work became the centrality of their lives, they had no time to think about religion.

“Busyness and Bitterness,” depicts the bitterness that was fomented due to busyness. The female informants were entangled in the complication of the familial relationships. Busyness with work and family developed into bitterness and obstructed them building relationship with people and with God.

The stories of “The Filial Daughter-in-law,” narrates the challenges when they wanted to follow Jesus. Exceptionally, Mrs. Ai overcame the bondage of tradition. She was not only being filial but also demonstrated the sacrificial love of Christ through her life.

The final theme, “Life is Good,” shows that a good life became a barrier to Christ. As compared to the older informants, these two informants managed their lives well and they did not feel the need for religion. Both life stories disclosed that life crises and transitions brought them to Christ.

In the next chapter, theological implications will be explored and recommendations for evangelism to the Chinese-speaking elderly will be considered.

6 Redefining the Elderly from the Glory of God — Missiological Implications

The objective of this research is to understand the sociocultural barriers encountered by the Chinese elderly when they follow Jesus. Results from the previous two chapters revealed that the barriers include: Daoist/Buddhist background, scarce Christian witness, family and work. These results have far-reaching implications as the barriers were observed in the changing sociocultural context of Singapore's rise from a third to a first world nation.²⁵⁸

At the beginning of nation building, life was very tough. Through the life stories of the Chinese-speaking elderly, they had to work doubly hard to make ends meet. Work dominated their lives. In the early 1950s, the Chinese-speaking community was mostly Daoist and Buddhist, the Christian population low. They had no time and no opportunity to follow Jesus. Adding to the difficulties, familial relationships were complicated especially among in-laws. In the midst of busyness, familial conflicts remained unresolved and bitterness fomented. Moreover, they were bounded by Chinese traditional and religious beliefs; crossing to another religion was unimaginable.

Stepping into the 21st century, these barriers are still as formidable even though the Christian population has risen to 18% in Singapore.²⁵⁹ Being a first world nation,

²⁵⁸ Orville Schell, "Lee Kuan Yew, the Man Who Remade Asia - WSJ," accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/lee-kuan-yew-the-man-who-remade-asia-1427475547>, Schell states that Singapore was a backward Third World outpost in the 1960s but now it became the wealthiest country in Asia with a per capita income of \$55,182 in 2013.

²⁵⁹ "Statistics Singapore - Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 1 Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion," 21.

living standards have risen as well as the cost of living.²⁶⁰ Work continues to dominate the lives of Singaporeans.

Although the elderly are retired, the working mentality remains part of their DNA. Work continues to define their identity. The elderly are lost without work. Coupled with physical frailties as they age, they do not know what to do and thus do not know who they are. As for the female informants who were housewives, family constructs their identities. Unresolved bitterness continues to be a barrier for them to follow Jesus. Even when these informants are baptized, their identities, grounded in work and family, still obstruct their way to Jesus, and thus the abundance in Christ.

From the results of the pathways, the elderly followed Jesus because of their loved ones. It was the good Christian witness of family members that influenced the elderly toward Jesus. Another reason was that their physical and emotional needs were met. They experienced the reality of God through physical healing and joy in church. Thus, rational and intellectual factors are secondary considerations for the Chinese elderly to follow Jesus.

From these results, three missiological implications were drawn. In this chapter, I will discuss these implications from three perspectives. First, from a soteriological point of view, for these elderly following Jesus is not just a decision but commitment. It is a commitment to the process of transforming their identities as the children of God in relationship with Christ -- from someone whose identity deeply rooted in their work and family to someone whose identity centered in Christ.

²⁶⁰ "Singapore: December 2014, Country Report," 11

Second, from an ecclesiological perspective, the church has to become their extended family in order to deepen their identities as children of God. Sharing the gospel with the elderly, one first has to understand their physical and emotional needs. For example, eating together and offer a pair of listening ears is the most direct approach to make them feel loved as a family. Only when they belong, will they be willing to listen. In most cases, they have to feel belonging before they believe.

Third, from a gerontological viewpoint, elderly can be a light to the world as they envisage that positive change is possible when they follow Jesus. Even in the frailty of aging, they can still envision hope.

6.1 Soteriology: Following Jesus is a process of forming the identity as children of God

From the life stories, the pathways that led Chinese elderly to Jesus might cause one to think—are they really saved? There is no mention of sin or repentance in their stories. Most of the informants followed Jesus because they were bored and lonely after retirement. Some were caught in a life-and-death crisis and they experienced healing. Some wanted to follow their children. Some were baptized because they were disappointed with their previous religion. A handful of them felt that *seng Zu* was simpler when compared with the complicated Daoist rituals and ceremonies. For example, when Mr. Ting mentioned to me that he was not sure whether Jesus would save his soul because he was not good enough, I was shocked. His identity as a child of God was defined more by good works rather than through believing Christ as his savior.

What does *seng Zu* mean to these elderly - believing in the Lord, yet still feel lonely and bitter? Believing in the Lord, yet feeling lost without their work? Believing in the Lord, yet worrying hopelessly about their deteriorating health? Believing in the

Lord, yet not sure that Jesus will save them? The barriers to follow Jesus are indeed just as formidable after they are baptized.

The New Testament repeats in many places that when one believes, one is saved (Mark 16:16; Luke 8:12, 8:50; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9, 10). All these elderly proclaim in the Teochew expression that they “*seng Zu*,” that they believe in the Lord Jesus. Hence, one should not doubt their salvation. These elderly may not fully grasp the meaning of repentance when they cross over to Christianity from their previous beliefs. But discarding their idols, handing over the ancestor altars, and praying to Jesus are the means to submitting their allegiance to Christ, and thus repentance. Repentance in a moral sense of reconciliation with God and with people requires time, as repentance is always the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-8). Thus, following Jesus is not just a decision but a process.

The conversion of Paul exemplifies that following Jesus and becoming Christ-like is a process. Although Paul’s encounter with Christ was dramatic, his transformation from a follower of Christ to an apostle to the Gentiles did not happen overnight. C. H. Dodd delineates Paul’s change through examining his epistles. He states that Paul’s personality goes through a developmental process over a long period of time.²⁶¹ For example, in the second letter to the Corinthians, there were “full of caustic sarcasm and indignant self-vindication” (2 Cor. 10 – 13).²⁶² The traces of fanaticism and intolerance

²⁶¹ Charles Harold. Dodd, *New Testament Studies* (Manchester: University Press, 1967), 67-128.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 80

disappear in Paul's later letters even when he deals with controversial matters (Rom. 2: 15-15; 13:1-7).²⁶³

Similarly, transformation of the elderly requires time. Not all informants encountered Jesus personally at first; but one cannot deny that their decision to baptism was the work of the Holy Spirit through the witness of family members. For the Chinese elderly, baptism is not merely a decision but a commitment to a new religion.²⁶⁴ For example, although Mr. Huang admitted that he followed his wife to baptism ten years ago He said,

The reason why I baptized was because most of my kids and grandkids are Christians, and my wife was sick ... After attending the church regularly for about two years, my wife said she wanted to be baptized. I said to myself, so let's become Christians together ... I did not think too much about the meaning of baptism; I just wanted to be together with the family... Two years ago, I was diagnosed with lymphoma, and witnessed many friends' sudden death, and then I suddenly felt that my whole life belongs to the Lord and then I truly believed in the Lord.

During his baptism, Mr. Huang publicly witnessed that he *seng Zu* but he felt that his life only experienced genuine transformation eight years later. Baptism, a formal initiation ritual, made him feel that he belonged to the church. It was in this belonging that he encountered the living God. As he turned to the Lord, his life was transformed.

Arthur McPhee notes that the New Testament describes Christian in three tenses: past (Tit. 3:5), present (1 Cor. 1:18) and future (1 Pe. 1:5). This implies that there is no

²⁶³ Ibid., 81

²⁶⁴ Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore Society*, 117.

mature Christian, only maturing Christian.²⁶⁵ There is no full-grown Christian until the *parousia*. Once again, salvation is a process of growth into maturity.

David Bosch also states that salvation is “initiated by one’s encounter with the living Christ but complete salvation is still outstanding.”²⁶⁶ Bosch explains that Paul normally refers to salvation in the future tense (Rom 5: 10). This has to do with the fact that “Paul thinks in apocalyptic categories and wishes to emphasize that comprehensive salvation is reserved for the coming triumph of God.”²⁶⁷ Hence, for the elderly to anticipate the coming triumph of God in hope, the key lies in how they are being disciplined after they were baptized. Elderly believers “without nurture are like still-born babies.”²⁶⁸ This challenges churches to walk alongside the elderly to remove their barriers in this process of salvation and this is through strengthening their identity in Christ.

Theologically, the barriers of the Chinese elderly can be thought of as the “veil” of the Israelites as depicted in the second epistle to the Corinthians (3:12-16). The minds of Israelites were hardened because of their tradition and culture – they read the Old Testament without lifting “the veil,” and as such, they missed Christ. For the Chinese elderly, before they followed Jesus, the identity of the Chinese elderly was mostly defined by their work and family that was infused in the milieu of Chinese traditional and religious belief; hence, the social and cultural factors became a veil that kept them away

²⁶⁵ Arthur G McPhee, *Friendship Evangelism: The Caring Way to Share Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 62.

²⁶⁶ David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 394.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Albert Cook Outler, *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, Tenn.: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 21.

from Christ. After they were baptized, their identities as children of God began the process of formation.

Paul uses the image of Moses' veil from Exodus 34:29-35 to explain the blindness of the Israelites, to show how the veil is removed and to teach what happens when the veil is removed.²⁶⁹ Paul says,

Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:15-18, NRSV)

Moses placed a veil on his face to prevent Israel from seeing the glory on his face so that they would not be judged by God.²⁷⁰ However, Paul has pointed to this veil as masking an already-being-abolished glory, his purpose was to point forward to the greater and permanent glory of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:7-13).²⁷¹ Instead, the veil became a barrier to the Israelites from the greater glory, as their hearts were hardened and their minds blinded.

The key to removing the veil and transform their hearts is to turn to the Lord (2 Cor. 3:16). As one beholds the Lord in the mirror, one is transformed into "the same image" of Christ. Paul Barnett explains that Paul saw the glory of God on the Damascus Road and he speaks representatively as one who sees the glory not with his eyes but in his heart. God shone in Paul's heart so that the glory of God in the face of Christ might

²⁶⁹ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 189.

²⁷⁰ Scott J. Hafemann, "The Glory and Veil of Moses in 2 Corinthians 3:7-14," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G K Beale (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 295-308.

²⁷¹ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 192

be *reflected* in Paul. Paul's hearers see the glory of Christ as they hear the gospel, which in turn gives the knowledge of God (4:6).²⁷² Paul and all who have turned to the Lord, with unveiled faces, are in the process of being transformed from one degree of glory to another.

Similarly, when the Chinese elderly experience the love and care of their Christian family members, they see the glory of God and they are attracted to follow Jesus. For example, Mr. Chan was supported by his daughter and son-in-law when he got depression; Mrs. Ai learned how to love generously from her uncle and aunty who adopted her as their daughter; Mr. Ang came through his wife's daily support; Mrs. Wang turned to Jesus because of the love of her dying son. As for the other life stories, in one way or another, when they tasted the goodness of Christ, their lives were transformed. Brothers and sisters of the church, serving as the body of Christ, play an important role in reflecting the glory of God to these elderly.

Cross-referencing Romans 8, Barnett further explicates about this transformation,

Our transformation is nothing else than a transformation into the moral and spiritual likeness of the now glorified Christ. It is transformation into that Christ-likeness of the now glorified Christ. It is transformation into that Christ-likeness which will be ours in the end time, when he will be "the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29).²⁷³

As the elderly enter into the family of Christ, with Jesus as the eldest brother, they are in the process of transforming into Christ-likeness. The voice of the Heavenly Father when Jesus was baptized declares, "You are my beloved son, whom I am well pleased," will become more and more distinct in their lives. Consequently, the identity as a child

²⁷² Ibid., 206

²⁷³ Ibid.

of God can liberate them from their bondage from work, family, bitterness or success in life.

For more than half of their lives, the Chinese elderly found their identity in their work and family. This identity became a veil that prevents them from seeing themselves as the beloved children of God. The good news of salvation, it is a process, and thus, transformation. As they turned to Christ through the deflected glory of Christian witness, their veils are removed. As they continue to deepen their identity as the children of God, they are freed from all spiritual and moral bondage.

Understanding the rationality of conversion from an anthropological and psychological viewpoint, Robert Hefner writes,

The most necessary feature of religious conversion, it turns out, is *not* a deeply systematic reorganization of personal meanings but an *adjustment in self-identification* through the at least nominal acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting, useful and true. In other words, at the very least—an analytic minimum—conversion implies the acceptance of a new locus of self-definition, *a new*, though not necessarily exclusive, *reference point* for one's identity.²⁷⁴ (Italics mine)

When Chinese elderly follow Jesus they find a new reference point for their identity. Their identity as the children of God enables them to break through the sociocultural barriers of work and family as they follow Jesus. With this new identity, they anticipate the comprehensive salvation of God. Subsequently, their lives abound with the abundance of Christ.

²⁷⁴ Robert W Hefner, "Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993),17.

6.2 Ecclesiology: Church as Family

Michael Goheen, author of *A Light to the Nations*, writes on the missional nature of the church. He states, “Ecclesiology is about understanding our identity, who we are, and why God has chosen us – whose we are.”²⁷⁵ He emphasizes that “if we do not develop our self-understanding in terms of the role that we have been called to play in the biblical drama, we will find ourselves shaped by the idolatrous story of the dominant culture.”²⁷⁶ Just as the elderly require strengthening their identities as children of God, the church has to understand her role in the metanarrative of God’s story.

In addition to Goheen’s thirteen facets of a missional church today,²⁷⁷ a fourteenth is proposed — the church as an extended family to the elderly in order to deepen their identities as children of God.

From the results in the previous chapters, family plays a paradoxical role in the Christian faith of the elderly -- a barrier as well as a pathway. Elderly were driven away from Jesus as they committed to work in order to provide for their families (14 occurrences). In contrast, elderly now follow Jesus because of the Christian witness of their family members (15 occurrences). In these cases, their physical and emotional needs were met by their filial Christian children or loving spouse first, and then they encountered Jesus. Thus in order for the elderly to continue growing in Christ, the church must serve as an extended family to the elderly.

Dennis Kinlaw points out that God is familial. The familial character is not an attribute of God but his actual ontological nature.²⁷⁸ In the Old Testament, God knows

²⁷⁵ Michael W Goheen, *A Light to the Nations : The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 5.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 202-226

Israel as his *firstborn son*. He instructed Pharaoh to let his *son* go. He describes his relationship to Israel as familial. In the second book of Samuel, God uses the same familial language in his relationship with Solomon. He told David, “I will be a *father* to him, and he shall be a *son* to me.” (2 Samuel 7:14)

In Psalm 89, God says of David,

He shall cry to me, ‘You are *my Father*,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!’
I will make him *the firstborn*,
the highest of the kings of the earth. (Psalm 89: 26-27, NRSV)

Apparently, God sees his relationship with David as familial. Other Old Testament authors similarly use the same familial language: Hosea writes, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called *my son*.” (Hosea 11:1) Jeremiah also describes God as father to Israel (Jeremiah 3:4-5). In the relationship with the needy, orphans, widows and foreigners, “Yahweh is the sovereign Judge who will fight for justice for the alien, be father to the orphan, and protect the woman who has lost her husband. The paternal character of Yahweh’s relationship to humans permeates the Old Testament. He is like a father to his own.”²⁷⁹

Dennis Kinlaw asserts that the fatherhood of these passages is normally interpreted as analogical.²⁸⁰ The relationship between God and Israel and between God and David are seen analogies between a father and a son. However, this father-and-son relationship is not merely an analogy in the New Testament. When Jesus rose from the water in his baptism, the voice of the Heavenly Father expressed his affection with his

²⁷⁸ Dennis F Kinlaw, *Let’s Start with Jesus: A New Way of Doing Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 28.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 25

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

son's obedience. When Jesus spoke of his relationship to God, the God who Jesus said was a Father before there was a human family, Jesus was referring neither to metaphor nor analogy but metaphysics.²⁸¹ The relationship existed before creation and it was eternal. God is his eternal Father and he is God's eternal Son. His relationship with the Father is "the prototype (original) and all human familial relations are ectypes (copies)."²⁸² Jesus' relationship with his Father is the original after which all human filial relationships are patterned, both physical and spiritual.²⁸³ Hence, Jesus taught His followers to pray to the Heavenly Father (Matthew 6:8-9; Luke 11:1-2). Jesus also identifies those who do God's will as his true family (Mark 3:31-35).

In the letters to the churches, Paul picks up this familial relationship from the Gospels. The first thing he says about God in almost every letter is that God is Father. (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:4; 2Cor. 1:2-3; Gal. 1:1, 3; Eph. 1:2-3; Php. 1:2 etc.) As well, Paul emulates this father-and-son relationship and embraces Timothy and Titus as his loyal child in faith (1Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4). Paul understood what Jesus was teaching and exemplifying this relationship. Hence, Kinlaw aptly states,

Fatherhood is not a passing role that God plays in relationship to Jesus. Paul explains that Christ will ultimately reign, that every knee will bow and acknowledge him as Lord. Then Jesus will render up his kingdom to the Father from whence it came (1 Cor. 15:24). The original picture is of a family, not a court; and the ultimate context for the redeemed will be familial as well as legal. Terms like King, Judge, and Sovereign speak of what God does, of his relationship to the creation. Father speaks of who he is in himself eternally apart from the creation, and the kind of spiritual relationship he wants with all persons in his creation.²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Ibid., 26

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 28

Thus, biblically, the church is a family from the creation through eternity. With God as the Father and Jesus as the firstborn, the familial relationship among brothers and sisters are closely knitted by the Holy Spirit. However, the functional role of the church often overshadows the father-and-son's relational facet. In turn, Goheen observes, the church either becomes a mall or food court that provides a variety of programs to meet the religious needs of the congregation, or a community center that meet the social needs for its members, or a corporation that is more oriented toward efficiency rather than pastoral care and missional leadership.²⁸⁵

In order to share the gospel with the aging world, the church has to recover the ontological nature of family and become family for the elderly. Moreover, with the understanding that following Jesus is a process of deepening the identity as children of God, the attributes of a family become increasingly significance in evangelizing and discipling the elderly.

In Ephesians 5:21-33, Paul compared husbands and wives to Christ and the Church. Again, familial love was used to understand the relationship between Christ and the Church. Drawing the attributes of family from this passage, church as family is to be willing to love sacrificially, to be sanctified by the Word and to show respect for one another. These attributes can be demonstrated in ways such as offering a pair of listening ears to the elderly in the midst of busyness, learning their heart language so that the Word could be comprehended by them, and providing space and direction in time of bitterness and hopelessness among others.

²⁸⁵ Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story*, 15-16. Goheen uses other images like theaters classroom, hospital or spa, motivational seminar, social-service office and campaign headquarters or social-advocacy group to illustrate how the present churches in United States are shaped by the culture.

Considering the paradoxical nature of the family, Church as family can also become a barrier once it loses these qualities. It is common to see elderly switching from one church to another. Informants confessed that they did consider quitting church when they were wrongly treated or felt bored in church. However, one has to recognize that family is messy, and so is the church. Humans are imperfect but the Father is full of grace. David McCarthy nuanced that marriage is “structured to accommodate dysfunction,”²⁸⁶ hence, it allows for grace and redemption, despite sin and suffering, despite imperfect faith and practice.²⁸⁷ Church as family is still ontologically worth enduring. Dwelling in the church as God’s family, in time to come, the elderly will find a deepening identity as children of God.

Therefore, church as family advocates that sharing the gospel with the elderly is about relationship. Indeed, evangelism is all about relationship with Jesus and His people and the world. It is never a one-time event, not a program, but a long-term relationship with Jesus and His people, growing into maturity. In fact, this also speaks truth in evangelization to the world.²⁸⁸

6.3 Gerontology: Positive Change is Possible

In modern culture, many negative connotations are attached to old age: sickness, immobility, slow, burden, loneliness, bitterness, depression, dementia, and death among others. These stereotypes are not only among the young but pervasive among the elderly.

²⁸⁶ David Matzko McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of the Household* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 174.

²⁸⁷ Julie Hanlon Rubio, “Jesus, Paul, and Family Values,” *Ex auditu* 28 (January 1, 2012): 45–69.

²⁸⁸ George G Hunter, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992); Graham Cray and Mission and Public Affairs Council (Church of England), *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions in a Changing Context* (New York, N. Y.: Seabury Books, 2009); Tom A Steffen, *The Facilitator Era: Beyond Pioneer Church Multiplication* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

Gail Wilson analyzed that taking the identity as “not old” is a normal reaction to a culture that devalues old age. Those who are labelled “old” after retirement may continue to maintain the attitude denigrating old age that they have internalized over the life course.²⁸⁹ Unconsciously, they adopt these stereotypes through the years and they become their own victims. Hence, it is quite unlikely that one will admit they are old in this culture. With the unprecedented growth of aging population over the globe, how can one break through these negative stereotypes? How does one combat ageism?

Robert Butler coined the term “ageism” in 1969. He further defined the term in 1980 which comprises three distinctive yet inter-connected areas: (1) prejudicial attitudes toward older persons, old age, and the aging process, which includes attitudes held by older adults themselves; (2) discriminatory practices against older people; and (3) institutional practices and policies that perpetuate stereotypes about older adults, reduce their opportunity for life satisfaction, and undermine their personal dignity.²⁹⁰ In 1986, working with Congressman Claude Pepper, elderly in the United States celebrated the amendments of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act which brought mandatory retirement to an end.²⁹¹ However, after more than thirty years of its passage, Butler wrote in 2005 that “we [still] have a very long way to go.”²⁹² To combat ageism, more legislation remains necessary to clarify remaining issues.

In Singapore, the issue of ageism gained more attention in the scope of employment. In a recent survey conducted on Singaporeans’ attitudes towards aging,

²⁸⁹ Jason L Powell and Tony Gilbert, *Aging Identity: A Dialogue with Postmodernism* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2009), 74.

²⁹⁰ Robert N Butler, “Ageism: A Foreword,” *Journal of Social Issues* 36, no. 2 (1980), 8.

²⁹¹ Robert N Butler, “Ageism: Looking Back Over My Shoulder,” *Generations* 29, no. 3 (2005), 85.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 86.

nearly three-quarters of respondents, aged 60 to 74, indicate that they had never been prejudicially treated because of their age. The report states that discrimination is more likely experienced by those who are holding certain forms of employment.²⁹³ In another research focus on ageism and work revealed that elderly people wanted to work but have been unfairly marginalized by employers. Elderly people determine their worth according to the value of their work. They expressed that after they retired, it was very difficult to lead a meaningful life.²⁹⁴ This is in line with my findings that majority of the Chinese elderly found their identity through their work. However, as they followed Jesus, and found a new identity in Christ, positive change became possible.

In this research, all the informants were baptized after 60 years old. To the twenty-four informants, they have to overcome traditional, cultural, social, and psychological barriers daily in order to follow Jesus. Positive change is distinctively obvious among them. Mr. Goh described himself as an introvert. Before he met Jesus, he enclosed his life in his work and family. Now he is a cell group leader and leads a morning exercise group. He said he could not imagine he was sharing his story with me, for it was impossible for him to share openly before he followed Christ. Another example is my mother. Although she still does not know how to deal with her bitterness, she is becoming a more caring person. She visits the nursing home once a week and she finds meaning as she walks into other lives. The Word she hears during the worship service and Sunday school sanctifies her heart.

²⁹³ Mathew Mathews and Paulin Tay Straughan, "Results From The Perception and Attitudes Towards Ageing and Seniors Survey, 2013/2014," (Institute of Policy Studies, 2014), 50.

²⁹⁴ Peggy Teo, *Ageing in Singapore : Service Needs and the State* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 53.

As discussed in the previous section, following Jesus is a commitment to a process of deepening the identity as children of God; this identity not only helps elderly “unveil” sociocultural barriers but also removes the stereotypes labelled by the ageist culture. The Wemmick Story, *You are Special*, written by Max Lucado vividly describes how such barriers and stereotypes are removed. Although this is a story for children, it captures the positive change when one follows Jesus. The protagonist, a wooden boy named Punchinello, is deeply troubled. He does not know how removed the bad stickers attached to him until he finds his maker, Eli. The stickers symbolize the stereotypes and Eli, God.

Eli said these words to Punchinello, “The stickers only stick if they matter to you. The more you trust My love, the less you will care about those stickers.”²⁹⁵ Each time Punchinello remembers what Eli told him, the stickers fall off. This is also how the stereotypes of aging can be removed as the elderly follow Jesus.

St. Paul writes,

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Cor. 5:17-19, NRSV)

Hence, when the elderly follow Jesus they become a new creation and they find their new identity in Christ. Consequently, they will not be defined by work or family and even the culture. Moreover, they are entrusted with the message of reconciliation. In

²⁹⁵ Max. Lucado and Sergio Martinez, *You Are Special* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1997), 29.

time, when they are able to be reconciled with themselves and their loved ones, their bitterness will be able to resolve.

Positive change is not only possible; the stereotypes attached by the culture will fall off one after the other as they see themselves as the children of God. Their identity will not be defined by the culture when they identify themselves as special through the eyes of the Heavenly Father.

William Thomas points out that elderly people can change the world, especially when baby-boomers are restored from the entrenchment of ageism. He observes that an unprecedented global age boom of “better educated, more affluent, healthier, and more socially engaged” older people has emerged.²⁹⁶ “More than any generation in history, they have demonstrated an eagerness to challenge and even overturn long-established beliefs.”²⁹⁷ Similarly, the church has to confront this long-established ageism within the church first before evangelism to the elderly is possible.

As noted from the statistics in chapter 1, there will be a growing and massive number of elderly people across the globe. What will happen when these “better educated, more affluent, healthier, and more socially engaged” elderly people are being marginalized in the society?

From the Christian mission point of view, Timothy Tennent notes that, “God often takes initiatives at the margins, not always at the center of the Christian movement.”²⁹⁸ Andrew Walls also notes that “Christian expansion has characteristically

²⁹⁶ Thomas, *What Are Old People for?: How Elders Will Save the World*, 195

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Timothy C Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 233

come from the margins more than from the center.”²⁹⁹ The elderly in the margins will impact the world greatly once they are unleashed from the captivity of ageism. In turn, elderly can become light to the aging world and extend a helping hand to those who are entrenched in the ageist culture. Positive changes are possible not only individually but also collectively.

6.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, three missiological implications were delineated from the perspectives of soteriology, ecclesiology and gerontology. Derived from the results, salvation understood to be a process of forming the identity as children of God. The church as a family helps elderly people to deepen this identity. The identity as children of God gives them a new understanding of work, family, their past, and also the culture. It redefines the elderly in the glory of God, and unleashes them from the negative stereotypes in the ageist culture. Hence, elderly people can embrace aging with hope and positive changes among the elderly are possible.

In the concluding chapter, an approach to share the gospel with the Chinese elderly will be proposed and areas that require further research will be recommended.

²⁹⁹ “The Expansion of Christianity: An Interview with Andrew Walls,” accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2052>.

7 Living Forward Into the Lives of the Elderly – Recommendations and Conclusion

This dissertation began from a very personal concern – how to help my grandmother and mother to live abundantly in Christ. As I collected their life stories, I realized there was a thick web of sociocultural barriers that stopped them from following Jesus. My personal concern led me to see that the elderly are a much neglected group in the church and a marginalized people in the society, not only in Singapore but also in every modern city throughout the world. How do we restore their rightful position and status? How do we free them from their bitterness? How do we bring hope to them in their old age? I believe that the answer is in Christ. But, then, how do we lead them to Christ?

Rather than providing ways and strategies to reach out to them, informed by scholars and gerontologists, it is more important first to understand them so that the gospel can be shared with them appropriately. George Hunter strongly asserts that understanding always comes first in evangelism. He states,

The gulf between church and unchurched people is vast, but if we pay the price to understand them, we will usually know what to say and what to do; if they know and feel we understand them, by the tens of millions they will risk opening their hearts to the God who understands them.³⁰⁰

Similarly, sharing the gospel with the elderly, the first step is to understand who they are and where they are. Moreover, in the face of plurality of religions, diverse religious experiences, and the complexities of aging, listening to the stories of these long

³⁰⁰ George G Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism : How Christianity Can Reach the West-- Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 121.

neglected elderly and allowing their stories be heard is utmost crucial. Hence, this dissertation took the direction of understanding their sociocultural barriers by listening to their life stories.

Listening to the 24 life stories was a life-transforming journey for me. During my six years in a fast-moving pastorate, I felt regretted not being able to spend more time with the elderly. Visitation was often a ten to fifteen minutes conversation and a short prayer. I had the urge to share the gospel with them but had no time for them to share their stories with me. Consequently, the relationship with the elderly became lopsided, and there was no real relationship. To me, these elderly were just familiar faces. I did not know their past and thus I did not know them. Addressing their present needs was the best I could do, as though I was always the giver and they, the receiver. Listening to their stories changed the ball game. They became the giver, and I, the receiver. Real relationships were established through the process and our common identity as children of God was nurtured.

Andrew Walls notes,

The best clue to our identity is to whom we think we belong and who we think belongs to us... Relationships in one sense actually constitute the self. We can only identify the self by establishing its relationship to others.³⁰¹

These authentic relationships with the elderly enriched my life and their stories provided clues and patterns to the nature of the sociocultural barriers encountered by the Chinese elderly as they endeavored to follow Jesus. They were deeply rooted in the Chinese traditional and religious beliefs, and Christianity was foreign to them. Moreover, Christian witnesses were few in their cultural milieu. As well, life was tough and they

³⁰¹ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 45.

had to work hard to raise and support their families. From their life stories, four themes emerged: “Work is King,” “Busyness and Bitterness,” “The Filial Daughter-in-law” and “Life is Good.” These elderly were entrenched in their work and families, even after they were baptized. Their identities are still defined by their work and family. These led me to see that following Jesus, for the Chinese elderly, is a process rather than an event, it is a process of transforming their identity to become the beloved children of God. As such, the church has to become family to them in order to deepen this identity.

Many positive changes became obvious in these elderly’s lives. And from a gerontological viewpoint, positive changes in the individual can also bring positive changes to the community.³⁰²

With this understanding of the elderly, in the concluding sections that follow, I would like to make some recommendations on sharing the gospel with the Chinese elderly and creating intentional community for/with them. Possible future research that may help the elderly to grow abundantly in Christ will also be recommended.

7.1 Recommendations on Sharing the Gospel with Chinese Elderly

As a result of my research, I discovered that there are still many misconceptions about the Christian faith among the informants. From the life stories, one of the main reasons why these elderly follow Jesus was that they wanted to follow the religion of their love ones. As such, it was a cognitive assent as opposed to a complete shift in worldview. Their initial intention to follow Jesus was superficial rather than transformative. Although most of them went through the baptism course, the basic

³⁰² Barbara G Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Dutton, 1978); Richard Lyon Morgan, *Remembering Your Story: Creating Your Own Spiritual Autobiography* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002); Thomas, *What Are Old People for? : How Elders Will Save the World*.

doctrines were taught by literate means. In the life stories, doctrinal differences between their previous religions or beliefs were never mentioned as a factor for them to follow Jesus. So long as they were baptized, they claimed themselves as “believing in the Lord” (信主 *seng Zu*). But what does lordship mean to them?

For example, Mr. Ting was so faithful to his work and he claimed that if he was still working, he would not “*seng Zu*.” In other words, it was either work as king or Jesus as Lord. However, even after he “*seng Zu*,” for more than eight years, he could not reconcile with his unbearable past. He could not surrender his past to Jesus. He deals with his past by shunning away from it. As for Mrs. Long, although she claims that she “*seng Zu*” when she was young, she is still governed by Chinese tradition. She obeyed her unbelieving mother-in-law and delayed her baptism.

In the case of Mrs. Jin, the church only serves as one of her runaway shelters from her unresolved familial issues. She said, “...Joy leaves her when I leave the church.” Mr. Low, although baptized for four years, he is still working very hard to secure himself a place in the heaven. Others like Mrs. Meng, Mr. Chan, and my mother are fearful if they cannot walk, their lives will be miserable even they “*seng Zu*” faithfully. These “excluded middle”³⁰³ issues could not be resolved by the doctrines they learned in their

³⁰³Paul G Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Missiology* 10, no. 1 (January 1982), 44. Excluded Middle was first identified by Paul Hiebert as the questions of the middle level – the questions that are not addressed by science and religion. For example, questions of the uncertainty of the future, the crises of the present life and the unknowns of the past. These excluded middle issues are especially prominent among those who are converted to Christianity from the folk religions.

head. Consequently, syncretism and split-level Christianity³⁰⁴ become pervasive among the Chinese elderly.

7.1.1 Chinese Elderly as Oral Learners

The International Orality Network (ION) discloses that approximately two-thirds of the world's population are oral learners.³⁰⁵ Oral learners are those who learn best, and whose lives are most likely to be transformed when instruction comes in oral forms.³⁰⁶ These forms include stories, proverbs, poetry, chants, music, dances, ceremonies and rites of passage.³⁰⁷ Oral learners cannot, do not or will not take in new information or communicate by literate means. Ironically, 90% of the world's Christian workers present the gospel in highly literate styles. They use the printed page or expository, analytical and logical presentations of God's word. Consequently, it is difficult if not impossible, for oral learners to hear and understand the gospel, not to mention to communicate it to others.³⁰⁸

Sadly, since the printing of the Gutenberg Bible in the 15th century, Christianity "has walked on literate feet" and has directly or indirectly required literacy in others.³⁰⁹ Robert Schreiter notes the need to re-appropriate the approach to construct local

³⁰⁴ Paul G Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985); A H Mathias Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples across Cultures* (Monrovia, Calif.: MARC, 1997); Paul G Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews : An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008). Syncretism is the replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements. Split level Christianity is the coexistence of two or more faith systems within Christian but these systems are inconsistent with each other. For example, this Christian will to Christianity for ultimate questions and seek answers from folk religion for intimate questions.

³⁰⁵ ION/LCWE, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*. (Lima, NY: International Orality Network in cooperation with Elim Publishing., 2005), 3.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 4

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 5

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 3.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 69.

theologies in an oral culture. He observes that “proverbs, old stories and the like are legitimate vehicles for developing of local theologies in an oral culture.”³¹⁰ The literate learning preference depends upon written materials covering abstract categories that dissect and systematize Scripture for individual learning. Walter Ong states that this is not wrong, but it is not enough for oral learners who prefer more concrete, relational harmonization that connect the past to the present in a corporate retrospection that unites people and aids memory recall.³¹¹

Most Chinese elderly are good story-tellers, especially with their own. However, they are entangled in their own stories and cannot find a way out. They need a story larger than their own, a metanarrative, to rescue them. Scholars and practitioners believe that stories are the most effective way to communicate the gospel in a culture that is predominantly rural and semi-literate.³¹² Wright states that stories lie at the core of a worldview; formal belief statements, including propositional and theological statements, grow out of those stories.³¹³ Thus sharing the gospel or discipleship that offers only propositional teaching does not reach the center of the worldview. If we provide only propositional teaching and do not present biblical stories to challenge existing worldview stories, we run the risk of syncretism.³¹⁴ This is the case of my mother’s worldview, her service to God is to exchange for peace, health and wealth; it remains unchallenged over

³¹⁰ Robert J Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003), 84.

³¹¹ Walter J Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London; New York: Methuen, 1982), 9.

³¹² Bruce Hutchinson, “Communicating the Gospel through Story and Songs in Cambodia,” in *Communicating Christ through Story and Song : Orality in Buddhist Contexts*, ed. Neui, Paul H De and Lim, David (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2008), 218; Paul H De Neui, *Communicating Christ in Asian Cities: Urban Issues in Buddhist Contexts* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2009); David Lim and Paul H De Neui, *Communicating Christ in the Buddhist World* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2006).

³¹³ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God.*, 40–42

³¹⁴ *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, 35

the years of her belief. This worldview is also obvious, for example, in Mr. Low's and Mrs. Jin's life story.

In fact, the Bible is also written with a background of an oral culture. Biblical writers intended their works to be recited or performed in a communal setting. Biblical writers employed oral learners' friendly genres, such as narratives, stories, poems, proverbs and dialogical epistles; these genres are intended not simply to provide information, but to persuade their readers and move them to action. The Bible uses many oral methods to convey the gospel message to audience in different context, an oral context. We can imagine that preaching the gospel in a highly rhetorical Greco-Roman culture is dramatic and spirited, emphasizing the emotional impact of the Gospel on the hearers.³¹⁵

If we continue to use the literate approach to share the gospel with the Chinese elderly, I am doubtful that their misconceptions of the Christian faith and their "excluded middle" issues can be resolved. Following Jesus is a process of deepening their identity in Christ but they have to experience and understand the power of the gospel in *their* way of learning. Sharing the gospel with the elderly has to start from where they are. Chinese elderly, regardless whether they are literate or oral learner, they are forced to become oral learners as their physical condition deteriorate. Hence, I recommend the oral form of sharing the gospel with the Chinese elderly.

³¹⁵ Flemming Dean E., *Contextualization in the New Testament : Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 239.

7.1.2 Sharing the Gospel with the Chinese Elderly in Oral forms

Jay Moon offers a comparison of learning preferences between oral and literate learners.³¹⁶ This is helpful to understand how the elderly learn. He concludes that oral learners' preferences are so tied to memory, as it enables them to shape their thinking in mnemonic patterns that can be recalled later. Moon notes that "Redundancy also enables the oral listener to hear the same thing in different ways such that it forms a well-worn path that can be easily recalled in the future."³¹⁷

With these insights about oral-learners and the Chinese elderly, I proposed these recommendations as we share the gospel with the Chinese elderly in Singapore.

1. Centrality of Jesus as Lord: Regardless of whether we are sharing the gospel with young people or older adults, Anderson Leith states that, "the primary content of sermons for the 21st century should be the Word of God."³¹⁸ To be more precise, the centrality of God's word is the resurrected Christ as Lord. To share the gospel is to share the life of Christ. Rather than a didactic approach, teaching God's word and sharing the life of Christ through songs, stories or poems and the like from folk or popular culture will more effectively communicate to the elderly that Christ as Lord. Nevertheless, while these tools might seem more appealing to the elderly, they must always be seen as supportive actors and should not take center stage.
2. Understanding elderly sensitivity: An aging person can face the loss of sight, hearing, mobility or physical power, but the loss of dignity may be the most painful.

³¹⁶ W J Moon, "Discipling through the Eyes of Oral Learners," *Missiology* 38, no. 2 (January 2010): 127–140. Moon's compilation is based upon Walter Ong's book, *Orality and Literacy*. See appendix 7.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

³¹⁸ Anderson Leith, *A Church for the 21st Century* (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House Publishers, 1992), 204.

Sharing the gospel with the elderly requires high sensitivity; negative, pejorative, put-down, patronizing, and exclusive language are always out of place in the pulpit. William Carl points out that if our sharing begins with a patronizing attitude in preparation and ends with a patronizing attitude in delivery, however subtle our attitude may be, they elderly will feel it and our sharing will be discounted in part or disregarded entirely.³¹⁹

3 Styles of communication:

- a. Storying: As we have learned from the oral learners, sharing the gospel in story form will communicate well to a diverse group of people especially including the elderly. This is also their familiar style of learning as most elderly rely mainly on radio and television to keep in touch with the world. As stories are not confrontational, they disarm suspicious and one's protective stance. Stories preach but not "preachy," they speak emotionally to people's hearts. Stories are not overt teaching, but convey dialogue and allow for the Spirit's work, allowing God to determine the results.³²⁰
- b. Dialogical: A more casual and personal style of communication is desirable, including a give-and-take dialogical form. Face-to-face contact is helpful for those who are hearing impaired, which incidentally is usually a majority. A slower and more deliberate pace rather than a rapid-fire speech pattern is especially appreciated.³²¹
- c. Redundancy: To put it more homiletically, stories called for "restatement," it

³¹⁹ William J Carl, *Graying Gracefully Preaching to Older Adults* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 10.

³²⁰ *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, 16.

³²¹ Carl, *Graying Gracefully Preaching to Older Adults*, 134.

is to say the same idea in different words.³²² As oral communication is different from reading where we can flip back a few pages to pick up the author's flow of thought, orally, if one misses a point, one will continue to miss more and gradually become lost. Repeating or restatement helps the elderly grasp the message in a statement. However, at times, it is advisable to repeat the main idea of the message in a same statement to enhance their memory and also to reduce confusion among the elderly.

- d. Use of heart language: ION points out that the most effective way of communication among the oral culture is through one's heart language, the mother tongue.³²³ Speaking in their heart language breaks barriers, even if it is not perfectly spoken. The elderly will appreciate the effort and it opens their heart to listen. The heart language houses their innermost thoughts; it is through the language that their worldview is most likely to change. Using one's heart language ensures the message will be communicated accurately, thus minimizing syncretism.
- e. Use of music: Words touch the mind but music touches the soul. But to speak of "music as a universal language is a great misconception;"³²⁴ different generations and cultures have their own expression of music. Worship leader and missionary Dave Hall coined the term ethnodoxology. From the combination of two Greek terms, *ethne* (peoples) and *doxos* (praise/glory),

³²² Haddon W Robinson, *Biblical Preaching : The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 140.

³²³ *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, 26.

³²⁴ Robin Harris, "A Great Misconception - Music the Universal Language," *Worship Leader Magazine*, 2009, 26-28.

Hall defines the term as “the study of the worship of God among diverse cultures.” To reach the elderly in music, we too have to study and sing their heart music, just like sharing their heart language. There are different ways to use music to share the gospel with the elderly: 1) re-write the lyrics to their familiar tunes; 2) use short hymnals or the chorus of relevant hymns; and 3) compose new songs in their musical form.³²⁵ In fact, the use of music is not recent. Charles Wesley used music to communicate doctrinal truths;³²⁶ he even used the dance-hall music, and re-wrote the lyrics to share the gospel with the drunken sailors of his days.³²⁷

Finally, the key word to share the gospel message with the Chinese elderly remains “love.” The love of God that translates through the love of a family – where one can see, can feel, can touch, can experience, and can relate. Arthur McPhee points out that most of the time, people only give ear to what we share when they come to know that we accept them, love them and are anxious to show this love in tangible ways.³²⁸ It is also through this love that we become sensitive to their needs and begin to make changes in our approach, and experience the love of the *Abba* Father as his beloved son and daughter.

7.2 Recommendations on creating intentional community for the Chinese elderly

Using oral forms to share the gospel with the Chinese elderly helps to transform their worldview as they follow Jesus. However, if there is no intentional community

³²⁵ My church has produced a Teochew opera gospel music CD, very well received by the elderly.

³²⁶ S T Kimbrough, *Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley - Expanded Edition: A Reader* ([N.p.]: Lutterworth Press, 2014).

³²⁷ Charles Wesley and John R Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), 21.

³²⁸ McPhee, *Friendship Evangelism: The Caring Way to Share Your Faith*, 90.

where they can live out their transforming worldview, what they learned will still remain only head knowledge. The Chinese elderly need a community where they can practice and integrate the abundance of life in Christ.

In chapter 5, I underscored that the church has to become family to the elderly in order for them to enjoy the abundance in Christ. The church has to be intentional in creating such familial community. In most cases, rather than the church as a community figuring out how to create community where they can feel at home, these elderly have to learn how to adapt into the church.

In the church where I served for six years in Singapore, I was privileged to enjoy the heritage of the Teochew language and tradition. It was because of this language and tradition that many younger adults from other churches brought their parents to our church. These younger adults wanted to find the right church to suit their parents. Perhaps, it never crossed their mind that their own church could also make changes to suit their elderly parents.

As well, while it was this Teochew tradition that enabled many Teochew elderly to follow Jesus after sixty years of age, non-Teochew elderly would not have felt at home in our church. Undeniably, our church also did not make many intentional changes for the elderly; we just happened to inherit this tradition in God's grace.

In the Bible, as depicted in Chapter 2, the elderly were well respected by the community. They were looked upon as leaders and guides. Their wisdom was much treasured and the blessings they bestowed upon the younger generation were received with much significance. Elderly also played the role of peacemakers in the community. Growing old was never described as a problem in the Bible. In fact, in the primitive

societies, old age was much valued.³²⁹ However, as the number and percentage of older person increased in the context of modernity, especially the frail and demented, this perception changed. Elderly became burdens to families and society. Robert Butler noted that this attitude is even more pervasive as societies shifted from agrarian economies to industrialized economies. Industrialization has robbed the authority of the elderly as work is no longer centered in the home.³³⁰ Consequently, the elderly are discriminated in modern society and the same attitude has also seeped into the church.³³¹ In order to restore the elderly in the glory of God, the church has to be doubly intentional in creating community for the elderly to fight against the ageist culture.

Learning from anthropologist Victor Turner, *communitas* is created in the process of liminality.³³² If one can identify retirement and aging as a process of liminality to the elderly, *communitas* is not far away – only if one is willing to walk with the elderly in their liminality. As such, realistically, elderly leaders are in a better position to create *communitas* with the elderly as they are going through the same process of liminality. However, as the created community is intentional, adults with compassion and love for the elderly should also live forward with the elderly. They can also serve as a bridge

³²⁹ Leo William. Simmons, *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr. u.a., 1947).

³³⁰ Robert N Butler, "Combating Ageism," *International Psychogeriatrics* 21, no. 2 (April 2009): 211.

³³¹ Houston and Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors*, 30-32; Zonggao. Li, *Lao nian mu yang xue = Pastoral ministry with older Christians* (Taipei Shi: Yong wang wen hua shi ye you xian gong si, 2007), 85-88.

³³² Victor Turner and Roger D Abrahams, *The Ritual Process* (New Brunswick (U.S.A): Aldine Transaction, 2008), 127, 95. *Communitas* is not what we normally understand as community of "norm-governed, institutionalized, abstract nature of social structure." It is the close bonding among the initiates when they gone through same liminality stage. Liminality is a period of chaos, confusion, and uncertainty. It is "frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon."

between the elder and younger generations. Consequently, this community can bond different generations in unity.

As I reflected from the life stories and the process of collecting these stories, I offer three recommendations to create an intentional familial community for the elderly—
A community that loves proactively, listens attentively, and shares contextually.

7.2.1 Community that loves proactively

Like Jesus who came to the earth and became one of us, and loves us even when we were sinners and rejected him, he loves us to such an extent that he even died for us on the cross (Phi. 2:6-8). Being first loved by him, we learn how to love just as he loves us (1 John 4:19). To be like Christ is to be proactive in love. Being a familial community, the elderly need to see and experience this proactive love.

Many elderly yearn to be loved. In the life story of Mrs. Jin, she expressed that she never felt that her parents loved her and even thought that her mother was not her biological mother. She said, “I did not receive any love either from my parents, siblings, my children, or my husband.” Similarly, Mr. Chan also shared a childhood without love. Life was harsh and his mother passed away when he was eight years old. He was often caned by his father. He was left alone by himself when his father died eight years after his mother. He longed for a home but he could not even afford one when he was finally married at the age of 36. Hence, a familial community that bears the mark of proactive and sacrificial love will draw the elderly together.

Also, most elderly share the common experience of loneliness, illness, and the threats of death. Turner notes that in the rite of passage, transformation usually takes

place in the phase of liminality.³³³ However, they have to overcome the humiliation and rejection during this process. In order to create *communitas* with the elderly, the church must walk alongside intentionally with the proactive love of Christ. The love in Christ, through the familial community, will help them overcome their liminality.

7.2.2 Community that listens attentively

“Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.” (Deut. 6:4-5, NLT)

Hence, to love the Lord is, first, to listen. Likewise, in loving the elderly we have to give them our ears. In the process of collecting the life stories, one of my many realizations was that listening creates community. As I have written earlier, I had no time to listen to their stories during my pastorate. When I started to listen, a two-way authentic relationship is established.

A familial community is about relationship, but relationships are messy. Therefore, the community needs to listen to each another, not only for the sake of understanding, but also for love and trust. We were created for community (1Gen.2:18-24), a community as intimate and as interdependent like the various parts of the human body (Roms.12:5; 1Cor.12:12; Eph.3:6). As one in the body of Christ, we belonged to one another (1Cor. 12: 12-26).

One of the best ways to start creating a listening familial community is through writing the life stories of the elderly. Richard Morgan recommended that this can be an intergenerational activity in the church. Stories connect generations. As the wisdom and

³³³ Ibid.

experience of the elderly are shared with the younger generations and the older generations understood the situation of the younger generations, cross-generation barrier can be eliminated.³³⁴ In turn, an intergenerational community is created.

7.2.3 Community that shares contextually

Sharing contextually connects people. The incarnation of Christ as a human Jew exemplifies the necessity for contextualization in our sharing (John1:14). And as Paul imitates Christ, he became a Jew to the Jews, and became one under the law to those under the law (1Cor.9:20). As I spoke in the Teochew language to those elderly whose Teochew as their heart language, the barrier in language is removed, and a closer bond was built naturally.

Sharing the gospel with the elderly in oral forms is one of the ways to be contextual. However, to create a familial community, by sharing the gospel in stories or in music is not enough. The community cannot be sustained by the gospel in just word or other oral forms but through our lives. The gospel is best communicated when it is shared through our lives together as a community. Being contextual reflects our understanding, respect and love for one another.

One of the reasons why the Chinese elderly were attracted to my Teochew church was they could share an authentic Teochew meal together. It was through these meals together that lives were shared and community was created.

During the time while I was interviewing the informants, I noticed the church became more intentional in creating communities contextually. Five years ago (2010),

³³⁴ Morgan, *Remembering Your Story: Creating Your Own Spiritual Autobiography*, 12.

Elder Keng Hoon Heng initiated a recreation center for the elderly. She saw the needs of the elderly not only in spiritual terms, but also physical and emotional. She notes that, although most elderly live with their children in Singapore,³³⁵ they are usually left alone at home while their children are busy with their work. Loneliness couples with boredom, frailty, and illness, robbing their joy. As well, elderly who follow Jesus in their old age have difficulties in knowing their new found faith deeper.³³⁶

The recreation center started after two years of preparation. In view of the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, the programs of the recreation center include praise dance, kala-ok singing session, arts and crafts, teaching of English and Chinese languages, games like Sudoku and Bingo, testimonial movies and also Bible-verses sharing, and the like.³³⁷ Three days a week, from 9 am to 1pm, with an average of seventy elderly are served by more than thirty volunteers. The elderly have lunch together before they go home.

Financially, this center is supported by the church; thus all participants come free of charge. For the past three years, more than 20 elderly had decided to follow Jesus, and some were baptized. Elder Heng, 85 at this point of writing, has been the chairwoman of the center for the past three years. She is passing the baton to a younger elder who has been working with her closely. The senior pastor of the church, Rev. Dr. Lee Chong Soo, affirmed the importance of the recreation center. He reiterates that the center provides a platform for the church to live out their faith.³³⁸

³³⁵ See Table 2-3, Living Arrangement

³³⁶ *Sheng Ming Kang Le Zhong Xin Yi Zhou Nian Te Kan 生命康乐中心一周年庆特刊=Life Recreation Center First Year Anniversary Special*, 2013, 4

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1

Younger adults in the church can share their faith with their unbelieving parents by encouraging or bringing them to the center. As the programs are tailored contextually to their needs, the elderly feel less threatened when they come to the church. As they are served by another group of brothers and sisters, mostly in their same age, life is shared. These serving elderly bring joy to others and in turn, they also find joy and meaning in their participation.

As the church takes the lead in loving proactively, listening attentively and sharing contextually, the elderly tangibly experience the abundance of life in community. Gradually, they will live out these qualities in their walk with Jesus. Thus, a familial community is created. The community is initiated intentionally, and in time to come, it will become inherent in their lives as children of God.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

This study has identified the sociocultural barriers encountered by the Chinese elderly as they follow Jesus. Missiological implications through the lens of soteriology, ecclesiology and gerontology were made. Recommendations were proposed in how to share the gospel with the elderly and creating an intentional familial community. Coupled with the insights from the literature review, these are some of the areas that require further research:

1. A Contextual Approach in Sharing the Gospel: From this study, the younger informants between the age of 60 to 70 attained a higher education. Apparently, the generation of the baby boomers and those after will be even better educated. In Singapore, education has become an important yardstick in determining economic and

social success.³³⁹ This study also reveals that the use of Chinese dialects in Singapore will be lost in the near future; some scholars already noted that the use of Mandarin has already diminished significantly in the homes.³⁴⁰ As sociocultural context changes, barriers encountered by the Chinese elderly differ. Moreover, this research was limited to the context of Singapore. Chinese in other contexts may yield different results. This approach to share the gospel with the elderly must be researched contextually and reviewed periodically.

2. Understanding the Psychological Barriers: As this study focused on sociocultural barriers, it falls short on the psychological aspects. McAdams refers to personality as “a complex patterning of traits, adaptations, and stories.”³⁴¹ John Bowlby’s different attachment behaviors suggest clues on how different personalities respond to the transcendence differently.³⁴² As the percentage of the elderly population continues to increase, with the inclusion of more generations, this population group is becoming more heterogeneous. Hence, further research on the understanding of the psychological barriers as the elderly follow Jesus will be required.
3. Contextual Theology of Family and Work: This study reveals that elderly are deeply entrenched in their familial relationships, they do not know how to reconcile with their past. They either avoid past conflicts or try to forget the past. Thus they are unable to build intimate relationships with people which in turn affect their

³³⁹ Jaime Koh, *Singapore Childhood: Our Stories Then and Now* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2013), 109.

³⁴⁰ Chin Leong Ng, “A Study of Attitudes towards the Speak Mandarin Campaign in Singapore,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 23, no. 3 (December 2014): 53–65.

³⁴¹ McAdams, “The Psychology of Life Stories,” 112; Dan P McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live by* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁴² John. Bowlby, *Attachment* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Pickard and Nelson-Becker, “Attachment and Spiritual Coping: Theory and Practice With Older Adults.”

relationship with God. Some elderly buried themselves in their work like an ostrich, and make work the centrality of their lives. In order for the elderly to live abundantly in Christ, a contextual theology of family and work for the Chinese elderly is much needed.

4. Other Research: Enlightened by the Theory of Gerotranscendence,³⁴³ research on how to help the elderly reflect on their life stories and find the meaning in their past is required. Also essential, further studies are necessary on how to enable the Chinese elderly to face the reality of age and death in hope, consequently allowing them to enjoy a closer communion with God.

The initial motivation of this study is to help the Chinese elderly living abundantly in Christ. In the life story of the filial daughter-in-law, Mrs. Ai was one of the exceptions among the other informants to enjoy a life that is “round and complete” (圆圆满满) in her old age. Fifteen grandchildren and two great-grand-children by her side weekly, she finds joy and satisfaction in these familial relationships. A Chinese proverb, *han yi nong sun* (含饴弄孙), describes the satisfaction and fun in later life as similar to having “a piece of candy in the mouth and have fun playing with the grandchildren.” However, an abundant life in Christ is more than this. As more studies are being conducted and put into practice, Chinese elderly can expect to live more fully into the abundance in Christ, without the fear of frailty, illness and death.

³⁴³ Tornstam, “Maturing into Gerotranscendence;” Tornstam, “Gerotranscendence: The Contemplative Dimension of Aging;” Erik H Erikson and Joan M Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997); Richard Lyon Morgan, “Jung’s View of the Later Years,” in *Dimensions of Older Adult Ministry: A Handbook*, ed. Morgan, Richard Lyon and Gilliss, Martha S. (Louisville, Ky.: Witherspoon Press, 2006), 11-25.

7.4 Conclusion

Sharing the gospel with the Chinese elderly and helping them live abundantly in Christ is never an easy task but always urgent. However, if church leaders determine their priority of ministry in terms of efficiency, the Chinese elderly will continue to be an unreached and neglected people. Like Christ who became incarnate from heaven, and humbled himself to become like one of us; if we can also humbly live forward to be with the elderly and enter into their lives, not only their lives, but ours as well, will also be transformed – for all of us will inevitably join them as elderly.

The world often sees elderly people as problems to be fixed. In his memoir, *The Pastor*, Eugene Peterson confesses that by reducing people to problems to be fixed, he omitted the greatest thing of all in their lives, God and their souls.³⁴⁴ The elderly are treasures to the faith community; they have a storehouse filled with memories, stories, music and wisdom. When we embrace the elderly into our lives, and open ourselves to their experience, not only will our culture and tradition roots will be treasured, but as well, we will be enriched with knowing where we come from and where we are heading towards more confidently.

With the abounding love of the gospel, we can grow together as children of God and create positive change to the aging world as we listen to the stories of the elderly. Loving proactively, listening attentively, and sharing contextually as we are called by the Lord, enables us to reach out to the graying temple.

³⁴⁴ Eugene H Peterson, *The Pastor : A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 140.

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9 Appendix

9.1 Appendix 1: Questions to understand the lived experience before Baptism

Childhood

- How would you describe yourself when you are young?
- Do you have a happy childhood? What is the best memory of your childhood?
- What are the toughest?
- What are your dreams?
- Do you felt loved when you are young?
- Who love you most?
- How do they express their love to you?
- Do they punish you? How?

Parents

- How would you describe your parents?
- What do you like most about them?
- What do you think you inherited from them?
- What feelings come up when you recall your parents?

Marriage and Work

- When do you get married?
- How do you get to know your wife/husband?
- What do work as to make a living? When is the most difficult time?
- How do you overcome those difficult times?
- Where and who did you find help and what do you find most helpful?
- How would you deal with your moments of loneliness and disappointment?
- What relationships in your life that is most significant? Can you talk about these relationships?
- What have they helped or hindered your personal growth?

Religion and Tradition

- Do you have any spiritual experiences?
- When do you begin to think about God?
- What is the role of religion in your life? (Before and after baptism)
- What are the cultural and traditional influences that are still important to you today?
- What are the family or cultural celebrations, traditions or rituals that are important to your life?

About aging and death

- How do you feel about your retirement?
- What are some of the main difficulties you encountered during your adult years?
- Did you fear growing old?
- What are your fears?
- How do you deal with them?

- Did someone close to you die?
- What do you want most to experience before you die?
- How would you like to die?
- What three things would you like said about your life when you die?

Others

- What are the crucial decisions in your life?
- What is your biggest worry now?
- What matter the most to your now?
- When you think about the future, what makes you feel most uneasy?
- Do you have any advice for the younger generation?

9.2 Appendix 2: Questions to understand the moment or period when they decide to follow Jesus

Understanding what happen when they are making the decision...

- Can you share something about your Christian friends or relatives before you decide to follow Jesus?
- How did your Christian friends approach you?
- What are the good/bad experiences you have with them?
- What kinds of Christian events have you attended?
- What are the messages that create an impression in you?

Understanding what happen after they have made the decision...

- What kinds of temptations do you encounter after the decision?
- What types of reactions did you receive from family, friends, relatives, and the community at large?
- How did you inform them about your new faith?
- What can be changed or what could have been done to improve their reactions in a positive way?
- How has your view about Christianity changed since you become a Christian?
- What can you do to change the image of Christianity for your friends who still in their previous religion?
- What have changed in your life?

9.3 Appendix 1: Theories of Aging Based Upon Biological Determinism

Theory	Central Question	Key Assumption(s)	Theorist(s)
Evolution	Do differentiation and adaptation continue in the post-reproductive phase of life? Is Longevity genetically determined?	The force of natural selection declines with age and there may be direct, selective pressure for senescence. 1) Longer-lived parents have longer-lived children 2) Nearly universal sex difference favor the female 3) Longevity is related to species. 4) Deaths of identical twins occur close in time.	Darwin (1872) Rose (1991) Rockstein (1974)
Genome	Is aging genetically programmed?	1) Certain genes may alter physiology in later life, leading to death. 2) Cells contain certain programs determining the number of times they can reproduce.	Hayflick (1977)
Wear-and-tear	Does metabolic rate affect longevity?	Rate of energy expenditure in metabolism affects longevity.	Rubner (1908)
Running-out-of-program	Do genes that produce positive outcomes in early life produce negative outcomes later?	Genes may no longer be able to correct for problems or reduce wear-and-tear on the body.	Enesco & Kruk (1981) Masaro (1984)
Sub-theories Gene mutation	Do gene mutations accumulate?	Genetic mutation causes functional loss in cells, leading to lowered resistance to diseases such as cancer.	Sinex (1974)
Accumulation-of-errors	Do changes in the body's proteins affect aging?	Problems with protein synthesis result in cellular damage.	Cutler (1982) Bjorksten (1974)
Neuro-endocrine	What role do the hypothalamus and the pituitary play in aging?	They may be the body's "master timekeepers"; their changes reduce the function of homeostatic mechanisms.	Finch & Landfield (1985) Dillman (1981)
Autoimmune	Does the immune system change?	1) The immune system may develop antigens to the body's proteins. 2) There may be a reduced efficiency in recognizing and destroying foreign proteins.	Walford (1969) Adler (1974)

9.4 Appendix 4: Theories of Aging Based Upon Social Determinism

Theory	Central Question	Key Assumption(s)	Theorist(s)
Disengagement	Are elders excluded from roles by social forces in agreement with their desires?	A mutual process of disengagement of the individual and the social world is normative	Cumming & Henry (1961)
Activity	How do various types of activity contribute to elder's adaptation?	1) Meaning activities are defined by the interaction of the individual and the society. 2) Informal activity contributes to well-being; highly structured activity may hinder well-being; solitary activity has little effect.	Caven et al. (1949) Burgess (1960) Longino & Lipman (1982)
Continuity	What is the effect of stability of social roles?	1 Those who maintain role stability adapt most successfully to aging. 2 Stability of personality contributes to role continuity and well-being.	Atchley (1971) Neugarten et al. (1977)
Social competence/ breakdown	How do individual conditions and social expectations interact dynamically?	1 Negative feedback cycles occur when individual dysfunction is socially reinforced.	Kuypers & Bentson (1973) Matras (1990)
Age stratification	How does cohort affect aging?	1 Characteristics of old age will vary according to cohort. 2 Older people develop a sub-culture that redefines essential assumptions about health, work, status, etc.	Fomer (1974, 1986) Rose (1965)
Dependency	How does the distribution of political/economic power affect older people?	1 Political and economic status determine the outcomes of aging, especially for women. 2 Government programs for elders give jobs to service provider but do not substantially change life conditions.	Wallerstein (1979) O'Rand & Henreta (1982) Estes (1979)
Social exchange	What maintains social interaction among different age group?	1 Interaction occurs and continues if it is perceived as mutually beneficial. 2 Older people do not have socially valued characteristics to offer in expchange relations and thus have fewer social interactions.	Blau (1964) Emerson (1976) Dowd (1975, 1978, 1980)
Social phenomenon logical	How is the meaning of age and aging socially constructed?	Everyday social life influences how people subjectively evaluate their life for circumstances.	Gubrium & Lynott (1983)

9.5 Appendix 5: Invitation Letter

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Dear Uncle/Auntie

I am a doctoral student in Intercultural studies of Asbury Theological Seminary, requesting your permission to participate in a study on your experience as an elderly Christian.

By 2050, one of three persons in the world will be aged 60 years or older. By then, the church pews will be filled with persons of mature age. Churches, especially the Chinese churches, need to be prepared for this. Yet for this to be possible, the voices of the Chinese older adults need to be heard.

You were identified as a potential research participant in this study by your church leader because of the years you have been in the Christian church. I am interested in hearing you tell your story and how faith has affected your life. Your participation in this research will be valuable because it will contribute to the larger understanding of how to evangelize and disciple the older adults in the years to come. It is OK if you don't feel like experts. The study needs ordinary people just like you and me. You will have the information the study needs.

If you choose to participate, your participation will involve two to three interview sessions. I would like to come and visit you two or three times over the next month to hear you talk about your life and how it has been and is affected by your faith. You are free to decide where you would like to start, what details you want to include or leave out in the story, how they will be connected, how long the story will be, and even how much time you need. I assure you that your interview will be more like a conversation. There is no right or wrong answers, but only your story.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to discontinue participation at any time. If the interview process should become difficult for you, or if you simply wish not to participate any longer, you are free to withdraw. All the interview sessions will be tape-recorded for later transcription, coding and analysis. However, your identity will not be revealed in any report or publication resulting from this research. In order to protect your confidentiality, all your correspondence and story details will be coded by participant number rather than name. The transcripts will be sent to you two to three months after the interviews for verification and for you to keep.

If you choose to participate, please take some time to read the enclosed Informed Consent Form and return it with your signature and the best times and days to contact you for scheduling interview sessions. At the time of the phone call, please feel free to find out more details about the study. Thank you in advance for giving me your valuable time.

Sincerely,

Nam Seng Koh

Chinese Translation of the invitation letter

挚诚邀请

敬爱的 Uncle/Auntie:

我是美国阿斯伯利神学院跨文化研究的博士生。

世界正快速老化，根据统计，到了 2050 年，每五个人当中，就有一个超过 60 岁。新加坡老化的速度更快，将近每三个人就有一个。届时，教会将会有更多的银发族，而未信的年长者已经是一个广大禾场！教会需要更好的预备，把福音传给这些群人。为此，我们需要更多认识年长者，让更多人听见他们的心声，以便更好地帮助他们跟随耶稣，享受在基督里丰盛的生命。

经由您教会领袖与组长的推荐，因您在 60 岁以后洗礼，并持续在教会里成长，你生命的经历将能成为许多人的帮助。我所要收集的就是你信仰旅程的故事。你的经历将能帮助教会知道如何更好地向年长者传福音，并装备他们成为耶稣的门徒。

如果你愿意参与，我将和您安排时间进行一次或两次的访问，每次约 1 至 2 个钟头。访问内容将围绕在你的生活与信仰；我根据你的讲述，记录你的故事。我也会提出一些问题，以便更准确地记录。地点可以是在你家，教会，或一些安静的场所。为了帮助我在访问后的整理与分析，我将会录音或录影。但是，请放心，我不会泄漏你的身份。我将竭尽所能保护您的隐私。一切的出版将会以匿名的方式呈现。为了确保记录的准确度，我会把整理好的内容让您过目并保存一份。

挚诚邀请您参与这项研究。如果您愿意，请签署背页的同意书。谢谢您宝贵的时间，愿神赐福与您。

以马内利！

许南盛敬上

2013 年 2 月 18 日

9.6 Appendix 6: Consent form

Chinese Elderly Living Abundantly in Christ

If you have further questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact Nam Seng Koh at (978) 778-7591 or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Art. McPhee at (859) 858-2215.

I understand the procedures and conditions of my participation described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Chinese translation of Consent form:

《在基督里的丰盛》

研究同意书

在签署这份同意书之前，请先澄清任何有关这项研究的疑问

我_____在此声明，我已经被告知并清楚明白此项研究《在基督里的丰盛》的性质与目的。关于此项研究我已经清楚明白，我愿意参与并协助这项研究。

参与者签名：_____ 日期：_____

联络时间：_____ 电话号码：_____

地址：_____

研究员联络：

许南盛

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9.7 Appendix 7: The differences in learning preferences between oral and literate learners

ORAL LEARNERS	LITERATE LEARNERS
1. Conceptualize and verbalize knowledge with close reference to human life world	1. Analytical categories with knowledge structured at a distance from lived experience (statistics, lists, "how-to" manuals)
2. Conservative holism (formulaic expressions kept intact and repeated to remember wisdom)	2. Inventive and open to new expression
3. Elderly valued since they can remember past	3. Elderly not needed to remember past (knowledge is stored in books)
4. Aggregative tendencies (keep formulaic adjectives with nouns together)	4. Analytical, dissecting tendencies
5. Redundant or copious (to maintain context since oral utterance vanishes once spoken)	5. Economy of words (can backtrack to recover context)
6. Emphatic and participatory (involved with the speaker)	6. Objective and distanced (knowledge gained without knowing the speaker)
7. Limited vocabulary (1000-1500 words)	7. Large vocabulary (e.g., English dictionary has over 1.5 million words)
8. Learn by apprenticeship, mastering proverbs and other formulaic materials	8. Learning is highly analytical, abstractly sequential, classificatory, examination of phenomenon or truths

9.8 Appendix 8: Profile of Informants

Informant	Age	Baptism Age	Place of Birth	Dialect	Education	Denomination
Mrs. Long	78	62	Singapore	Hokkien	Pr. 3	Presbyterian
Mrs. Mei	67	65	Singapore	Teochew	Sec. 4	Presbyterian
Mrs. Yue	73	63	Singapore	Teochew	None	Presbyterian
Mrs. Ai	79	71	Singapore	Teochew	Pr. 3	Presbyterian
Mrs. Ying	84	80	Singapore	Teochew	Pre-U	Presbyterian
Mrs. Qing	68	62	Singapore	Teochew	Sec. 4	Presbyterian
Mrs. Meng	72	65	China	Hokkien	Pre-U	Presbyterian
My Mother	79	61	China	Teochew	3 months	Presbyterian
Mrs. Jin	73	72	Singapore	Teochew	None	Presbyterian
Mrs. Wang	64	63	Singapore	Teochew	Tertiary	Presbyterian
Mrs. Chuan	75	64	Singapore	Teochew	University	Presbyterian
Mrs. Lew	71	69	China	Shangdong	Sec. 4	Independent
Mrs. Liu	77	74	Malaysia	Hakka	Pr. 6	Independent
Mrs. Lai	77	68	Singapore	Teochew	None	Presbyterian
Mr. Ting	79	71	Singapore	Teochew	None	Presbyterian
Mr. Wei	81	79	Malaysia	Hakka	Pr. 3	Presbyterian
Mr. Chan	81	80	Singapore	Teochew	Pr. 1	Presbyterian
Mr. Low	78	74	Singapore	Teochew	Sec. 4	Presbyterian
Mr. Huang	76	66	Malaysia	Teochew	Sec. 3	Presbyterian
Mr. Tian	74	73	Malaysia	Teochew	Sec. 3	Presbyterian
Mr. Fu	68	63	Singapore	Hock Chew	Pr. 3	Presbyterian
Mr. Goh	68	62	Singapore	Hakka	Sec. 4	Independent
Mr. Ang	62	61	Singapore	Hokkien	Tertiary	AOG
Mr. Ru	87	78	China	Teochew	Pr.	Presbyterian

9.9 Appendix 8: Glossary of Chinese and local terms

Chinese Local Terms	Pronunciation M: Mandarin T: Teochew	Meaning	Appeared in Pages
哎呀	Aiyah (M/T)	Exclamation	99, 100
Attap maker	Ah Tup (T)	One who weaves coconut leaves for the roof of the attap house.	5
Barang-barang	(Malay)	Personal belongings.	97
百年	Bei Ni (T)	One hundred years, implies death.	121
大伯公	Da Bo Gong (M) Dua Bei Gong (T)	Daoist god, Big Uncle God	81, 83, 85, 102, 103, 107, 115, 118
二十四孝	Er shi si xiao (M)	Chinese classics, 24 Stories of Filial Piety	119
观音	Guan Yin (M)	Daoist goddess, Goddess of Mercy	81, 83, 85, 107
含饴弄孙	Han yi nong sun (M)	Having a piece of candy in the mouth and having fun with the grandchildren, describe the satisfaction of elderhood.	171
Hawker		One who sells any kind of goods or food in the market or along the street.	97, 100, 103
花甲	Hua jia (M)	Sixty years old	66
	Hum Hum (T)	Naïve, ignorant, take it easy	100
甲子	Jia zi(M)	Sixty years old	66
见证	Jian zheng (M)	Testimony.	114
平安	Peng Ang (T)	Peace that resulted from physical safety and well-being.	vi, 101
三从四德	San cong si de (M)	三从, “The Three obediences” that requires from the Chinese woman include obeying the father before marriage, obeying the husband in marriage and obeying the sons in widowhood. 四德, “The Four Virtues” are fidelity, physical charm, propriety in speech and efficiency in needle work.	112, 130
三代同堂	San dai tong tang (M)	Three generations under one roof	110
信主	Seng Zu (T)	Believing in the Lord.	101, 102, 104, 118, 123, 135, 136, 137, 155
圣娘	Seng Nio (T)	Holy mother.	122
相欠债	Sior kiam zeh (T)	Indebted to one another.	115
天干地支	Tian gan di zhi (M)	Celestial stems and terrestrial branches, also known as “The Sexagenary cycle”	66
云吞面	Wanton noodles	Chinese food, dumpling noodles.	100, 101
圆圆满满	Yuan yuan man man (M)	Round and complete, symbolizes a perfect life.	124, 171
紫微斗数	Zi wei dou shu (M)	Starfortune Zewistar, Chinese astrology, sometimes for fortune telling.	112

